



AN ALTRUIST

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Louise De la Roche

An Altruist

BY

OUIDA, pseud.

AUTHOR OF "TOXIN," "LE SELVE,"
"THE SILVER CHRIST," ETC.

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AN ALTRUIST.



THE scene is Wilfrid Bertram's rooms in Piccadilly, facing the Green Park. The time is six o'clock in the afternoon. The audience is a goodly number of men and women of that class which calls itself Society. The rooms are small and the guests are many. A few look contemptuously amused. A great many appear excruciatingly bored.

"It's all rot!" says one gentleman in confidence to his walking-stick.

It is the general opinion,

§ An Altruist

though it has but one spokesman.

“What a shame, when he is so much in earnest!” says a pretty girl.

“Bores always are awfully in earnest,” replies the critic. “If he’d only give us something to drink——”

“You can get plenty to drink in the street,” says the young lady, with a withering glance.

Meantime, Wilfrid Bertram, who has been speaking for more than an hour without contradiction, except such as he read on his friends’ faces, perceives at last that he has been wearying them; a knowledge which is always slow to steal upon the teacher of mankind.

He stops in the middle of a very fine peroration.

“My dear people,” he re-

marks, a little irritably — “I mean, ladies and gentlemen—if you are so soon weary of so illimitable a subject, I fear I must have failed to do it justice.”

“So soon?—oh, hang it!” says the man who has wished for something to drink. “We came upstairs at half-past four, and you’ve had all the jaw to yourself ever since, and it’s past six now, and we’re all as thirsty as dogs.”

An expression of extreme disdain passes over the lecturer’s face.

“I did not invite *you*, Lord Marlow,” he says, very coldly. “If I had done I would have provided beer and skittles for your entertainment.”

“Oh, I say Wilfrid, come, finish your address to us; it’s extremely interesting,” observes, in amiable haste, a much older

❧ An Altruist

man, with a bald head and pleasant, ruddy countenance, who is his uncle, Lord Southwold.

“Immensely interesting!” echo everybody : they can say so with animation, almost with veracity, now that they are aware it is drawing to an end.

“I ask your pardon if my infirmities have done injustice to a noble theme. I fear I have failed to make myself intelligible,” says Bertram, in a tone intended to be apologetic, but which is actually only aggressive, since it plainly implies that his pearls have been thrown before swine. He closes the manuscript and notebooks which are lying before him with the air of a person who is prepared for anything from the obtuseness and ingratitude of humanity.

An Altruist ❧

“Nothing could be clearer than what you’ve said,” says the gentleman who wanted a drink. “Nobody is to have anything they can call their own, and everybody who likes is to eat in one’s plate and bathe in one’s bath.”

“At theatres the buffoon in the gallery is usually turned out, with the approval of the entire audience,” Bertram remarks, with sententious chilliness. “Were I not in my own chambers——”

Lord Marlow laughs rudely.

“I don’t think you could throw me downstairs. Your diet of brown bread and asparagus don’t make muscle.”

“My dear fellow—before women—pray be quiet,” murmurs a guardsman who is on the seat next to him.

“Do finish your reading,

§ An Altruist

Wilfrid," says Lady Southwold, coaxingly. "Your views are so disinterested if they are a—a—a little difficult to carry out as the world is constituted."

"Excuse me," replies Bertram, "I have trespassed too long on every one's indulgence. It is, I believe, altogether impossible to attempt to introduce altruism and duty into a society which considers Lord Marlow's type of humanity as either wholesome or ornamental."

"I never knew a lecture that didn't end in a free fight," says his uncle Southwold, hurriedly. "But we can't have one here, Wilfrid, there are too many ladies present."

A shabby little old gentleman, doubled up in his chair, who is his grace of Bridlington, murmurs doubtfully : "I don't

An Altruist 56

see how your theories would work, Bertram."

"Don't you, Duke? Is there not such a proverb as *Fais ce que dois, advienne que pourra?*"

The duke nods, and coughs. "There is. But I am afraid it will land you in Queer Street sometimes. There's another old saw, you know, 'Look before you leap!' Safer of the two, eh?"

"For the selfish, no doubt," replies Bertram.

His hand is on his note-book ; he is thinking with regret of the concluding passages which he has not been able to read, and a little also that Cicely Seymour, the young lady who snubs Marlow, has a very beautiful profile, as a white gauze hat laden with white lilac rests on the fair coils of her hair.

¶ An Altruist

That brute Marlow is at her elbow, saying something idiotic ; Bertram cannot hear what, but he hears her laugh, and knows that she is probably being made to laugh at himself.

The intruding Marlow's jeer at his vegetarian views is unjust to him, for he is tall and well made, though slender ; but then, as his people often tell him, his muscle was built up in the score of unregenerate years before his Oxford terms, when he was as philistine as any other Eton boy, though he liked his books better than the playing-fields.

He is the younger son of a peer, has a little money of his own, and makes a little more by writing for scholarly reviews ; but beyond all he is an altruist, a collectivist, a Fourrierist, an Engelist, a Tolstoi-ist ; and,

An Altruist 50

in common with other theorists, he has imagined that to be told the truth is enough to make people believe in it and observe its gospel. He has been continually deceived in this impression ; but he has always held it, and it is proportionately irritating to him when, after having shed the light of information upon his contemporaries, they still show no symptoms of being converted.

Even the old duke, who is his godfather, and is generally tender to his theories, does nothing but nod his head and repeat like a magpie : “ Look before you leap ! ”

“ I think you said that property was like a cancer in the body politic ? ” observes a lover of practical politics, a Unionist member of parliament, putting his glass in his eye.

❧ An Altruist

“ I said the consolidation and transmission of property was so,” replies Bertram, with some hauteur : people cannot even quote him correctly !

“ Ah ! seems to me the same thing.”

“ No more the same thing than Seltzer and the Sellinger ! ” cries Marlow.

“ Oh, indeed,” says the politician, humbly ; “ forgive my stupidity.”

Bertram implies by a gesture that his indulgence to human imbecility is inexhaustible, but sorely tried.

“ I had hoped,” he says, sentimentously, “ that you would have gathered from my previous discourse how intense is my conviction that those who possess property should give it up, generously, spontaneously, for the good of all, before awaiting

that inevitable retribution which will fall on them if they continue to insult the People by their display of wealth, unearned and unjustified ; for the riches of the noble and the millionaire are as absolutely theft as any stolen goods obtained by violence and fraud, and do continually provoke the crimes which they so savagely denounce and punish——”

“Humph ! That’s strong,” mutters the duke.

“La Propriété c’est le vol,” murmurs Cicely Seymour
“La propriété d’autrui, oui ; mais pas la mienne !”

“If there’s no flimsy anywhere,” asks Lord Marlow,
“who’ll breed racers ?”

“Who’ll buy Comet clarets ?”

“Who’ll employ cooks ?”

“Who’ll keep up shootin’ ?”

“Who’ll build *Valkyries* ?”

§ An Altruist

“ Who’ll go by the Flying Dutchman ? ”

“ Who’ll dance cotillons ? ”

Bertram replies with dignity :
“ My friends, these are mere frivolous jests on your part. When the entire structure of our rotten and debased society shall have been shattered there will of course be no place in a regenerate world for these mere foolish egotisms.

“ Foolish egotisms ! ” echoes Lord Southwold. “ Oh, Lord ! A good glass of wine a foolish egotism ? ”

“ Do you mean you want Local Option ? ” asks the duke, with some alarm. “ I wouldn’t have come if I’d known that.”

Bertram answers with irritation : “ There is no question of local option or of total abstinence, Duke. If property were generally and duly distributed,

An Altruist 85

wine would be so too ; and if individualism were duly recognised, you would no more dare to interfere with the drunkard than with the genius.

“ African sherry all round—what a millennium ! ” cries his uncle. “ Tipplers all over the place, and no lock-up to put ’em in ! What an Arcadia ! ”

“ Genius has frequently been rudely compared to inebriety,” remarks the practical politician ; “ but I have never known quite such a slap in the face given to it as this. Max Nardau is deferential in comparison.”

“ Look, sir,” says Bertram, addressing the duke, but glancing at Cicely Seymour—“ look at the utter debasement of our financial system ! What are banks except incentives to crime ? What are the Bourses, the Exchanges, or Wall Street,

except large seething cauldrons of sin? What are the great speculating companies if not banded thieves for the stripping of a gullible public? What is the watch you wear, with its visible chain glaring across your waistcoat, except a base, mean, grinning mockery of the hungry man who meets you in the street? ”

Marlow takes out his watch.

“ My conscience is clear in that respect. My watch is a Waterbury, and wouldn't fetch the hungry man a shilling if he pawned it.”

“ And my chain,” says Lord Southwold, touching a steel one, “ was my poor old Hector's collar, and I wear it in memory of him. How he'd thresh out five acres of turnips before luncheon ! We shall never see his like.”

An Altruist §

Bertram grows impatient :
“Individually you may wear Waterburys or dog-collars, but each is nevertheless a symbol of inequality between you and the man in the street, who is obliged to look at the church clock to see the hour at which he may seek the parish dole.

“What profound philosophy !” cries Southwold.
“What crimes one may commit without knowing it !”

“If a watch be an unwholesome sign of a bloated aristocracy, pray, Mr. Bertram, what are our jewels ?” asks a very pretty woman, Lady Jane Rivaux.

“There are no words strong enough,” replies Bertram, “to condemn the use of gems, whether from a moral or an æsthetic point of view. In a purified condition of society

they would of course become impossible abominations.”

The ladies present are too horrified to speak ; Jane Rivaux, alone, recovering her first shock of surprise at such a blasphemy, asks, with vivacity :

“But all the people you would throw out of employment? The people who dig for jewels, don't they dig? The people who polish them, and cut them, and set them, and deal in them ; the people who make the iron safes, and the patent locks, you would throw them all out of work? Surely that wouldn't be doing any good? What would become of the miners and lapidaries and jewellers and all the rest?”

Bertram smiles with pitying disdain.

“Oh, my dear Lady Jane, your kind of reasoning is as old

An Altruist §

as the hills, and carries its own refutation with it. All those workmen and tradesmen would be liberated from labours which now degrade them, and would thus be set free for higher work—work worthy of being illumined by the light of reason.”

“What work? Would they be all schoolmasters and governesses? Or all authors and artists?”

“What work? Such work as the Community might organise and distribute, such work as might be needful for the general good. When every one will work, every one will have leisure. The poet will mow the meadow in the morning and compose his eclogues in the afternoon. The painter will fell trees at dawn and at noon paint his landscapes in the forest. The sculptor

will hew coal in the bowels of the earth for a few hours and come to the upper air to carve the marble and mould the clay. The author will guide the plough or plant the potato-patch at sunrise and will have the rest of the day free to write his novel or study his essay——”

“Humph!” says Southwold, ruffling his short grey hair in perplexity. “The precise use of wasting Sir Frederic Leighton’s time on a seam of coal, and Mr. Swinburne’s on a mowing machine, I don’t exactly perceive. However——”

“Pierre Loti is your ideal, then,” says Cicely Seymour. “He ‘has gone down to the deep in ships’ before he writes of sea life.”

“He is an officer,” objects

An Altruist 56

Bertram, with regret and condemnation in his tone. "With his true and profound altruism he should have gone before the mast."

"I suppose our sex will have to sweep and cook and sew before we are allowed to frolic?" asks Lady Jane.

"You'll have to produce a certificate that you have made and baked three dozen pigeon pies before you'll be allowed one waltz, Lady Jane," says Marlow, who has with difficulty kept his mouth shut.

"We shall sweep our own chimneys, clean ourselves, and play the violin," replies that lively person. "We shall have to cook our salmon before we're allowed to fish for it; we shall have to roast our pheasants before we're allowed to shoot them, and——"

§ An Altruist

Bertram interrupts her with scant courtesy : “ I understood that those who did me the honour to come here to-day brought open minds and philosophical views to this meeting, or I should not have invited you to discuss and consider the best means for the educated classes to anticipate the coming changes of the world.”

“ Why should we anticipate them,” murmurs the old duke, “ when they’ll be so deucedly uncomfortable to all of us? ”

“ Yes, indeed,” says Southwold, “ it’ll be bad enough to grin and bear ’em.”

Bertram plays wearily with his shut note-book.

“ If you cannot see the theoretic beauty of united and universal work, it is hopeless to expect that you should desire

An Altruist 86

its practical adjustment to everyday life."

"Well, but," says the politician, who is nothing if not practical, "it is just the utter unworkableness of your system which damns it in the eyes of rational men. Pardon my saying so."

Lady Southwold murmurs :
"Give them some tea, Wilfrid ; they are all growing cross."

"As you please. But it is to me absolutely frightful to see how unconscious of your own doom, and how indifferent to the great movements of the day you all are——"

"If they are really great movements, they'll move without us ; you can't stop an iceberg or an earthquake with your little finger. But there's a good deal of grit in the old order of things still," says the

☛ An Altruist

duke. "Yes, I'll have a cup of tea, Wilfrid ; I see you've got it there."

Bertram murmurs wearily :
" Critchett—tea ! "

" Yes, sir," says a person who is the perfection of all the virtues of valetdom.

Marlow, wholly undisturbed by the insults which have been heaped on him, calls out :

" And temperance drinks, Critchett ! Lemons divorced from rum, sterilised milk, barley-water, tartaric acid——"

" Mr. Bertram," says Cicely Seymour, " how do you reconcile your conscience to the debasing offices which you employ Critchett to fill for you ? "

" Or to the fact of keeping a Critchett at all ? " adds his aunt Southwold.

" Surely it's Critchett who keeps him, ——, out of a

strait-waistcoat ? ” murmurs
Marlow.

Critchett hands tea and coffee and chocolate, in a silver service, with cakes, fruits, and biscuits.

“ And all these pretty things, Mr. Bertram ? ” asks Lady Jane. “ Surely they are the flesh-pots of Egypt, and ought not to be here ? ”

“ They ought not,” replies Bertram, “ nor Critchett either.”

“ Oh, he is such a delightful servant ; so noiseless, so *pré-venant*, and so devoted to you ; you would never find his equal if you sent him away.”

“ No ; but for one man to serve another is contrary to all principles of self-respect on either side.”

“ My dear Wilfrid,” cries Lady Southwold, “ how I wish you were small enough to be

☞ An Altruist

whipped ! What a deal of good it would do you ! ”

Bertram smiles faintly.

“ Flagellation was, I believe, most admirable discipline ; but we have grown too effete for it. Our bodies are as tender as our hearts are hard. ”

“ I have always thought, ” said Cicely Seymour, in a very soft voice, “ that if everybody could be born with ten thousand a year, nobody would ever do anything wrong. ”

Bertram looks at her approvingly.

“ You are on the right road, Miss Seymour. But as we cannot generalise property, we must generalise poverty. The result will be equally good. ”

“ Good Lord ! ” roars his uncle very loudly. “ I never heard such a subversive and immoral doctrine in all my days ! ”

An Altruist

Bertram glances pityingly at him.

“And yet it is based on precisely the same theory as the one which you accepted when you passed the Compulsory Clause of the Parish Councils Bill.”

“The Upper House passed that infamous Bill. I was in the minority against it,” replies Southwold, very angrily.

“But when everybody’s got sixpence a day,” suggests a young man with an ingenuous countenance, “and nobody sixpence halfpenny, surely somebody’ll have a try for the illegal halfpenny, won’t they? It is human nature.”

“Certainly not,” replies Bertram, very positively. “Nobody will even wish for an extra halfpenny, because when inequality shall be at an end envy and discontent will be unknown.

§ An Altruist

Besides, if all the property of the world was confiscated or realised and equally distributed, the individual portion would come more nearly to half a crown a head per diem. On half a crown a head per diem any one can live——”

Lord Southwold sighs. “Oysters are three shillings a dozen,” he murmurs.

“Of course, if you expect to continue the indulgence of an epicure’s diseased appetites——” says Bertram, with impatience.

“It’s the oysters that are diseased, not our appetites,” says Southwold, with a second sigh.

“If,” says Bertram, ignoring his uncle’s nonsense—“if I have made anything clear in my recent remarks it must surely be that Property is, in the old copy-book phrase,

the root of all evil ; the mandrake growing out of the bodies of the dead, the poisonous gas exhaling from the carrion of prejudice, of injustice, and of caste."

"But, my dear Wilfrid," cries Lady Southwold, with equal impatience, "yours is rank Communism."

"You can call it what you please. It is the only condition of things which would accompany pure civilisation. When, however, I speak of half a crown a day," he pursues, "I use a figure of speech ! Of course, in a purely free world there would be no coined or printed money, there would be only barter."

"Barter !" echoes Marlow. "I should carry two of my Berkshire pigs, one under each arm, and exchange them with

¶ An Altruist

you for a thousand copies of your *Age to Come*."

"I think barter would be inconvenient, Mr. Bertram," says Cicely Seymour, doubtfully. "And what should I barter? I can't make anything. I should have to cut off my hair and wait a year till it grew again."

Every one laughs, and Bertram even relaxes his gravity.

"I fear, Miss Seymour, that Solon's self would give you all you wished for a single smile!"

At that moment a small boy comes into the room, out of breath, grinning, with several oblong pieces of printed paper in his hand; he pushes his way unconcerned between the ladies and gentlemen, and thrusts the papers at Bertram.

"Here, mister, you must tone these here down; manager says as Fanshawe says as the

An Altruist 56

British Public wouldn't never stand them pars. he's marked at no time ; and manager says as I was to tell you Public is extra nervous now cos o' that bomb at Tooting."

Bertram takes the sheets in ill humour, and tears them across.

"Mr. Fanshawe is well aware that I never correct and I never suppress. I forbid the production of the article in a mutilated state." He hands the pieces to the boy. "Bid Mr. Fanshawe return me my original copy."

The boy looks frightened.

"Who'll pay for this here settin'-up, sir, please, if proof ain't to be used?"

"Did you say Fanshawe?" says Lord Southwold. "Do you mean the great Fanshawe of the *Torch*? Can anything be possibly too strong for him?"

§ An Altruist

“Oh, my dear Wilfred ! do let us hear what you can have said ? It must be something terrific !” says the old duke, who rather likes subversive opinions, considering philosophically that he will be in his grave before they can possibly be put into practice.

“What ’m I to tell the manager about payin’ for the settin’-up of this here, if type’s to be broke up, sir ?” asks the boy, with dogged persistence.

“Go out of the room, you impudent little rascal !” says Bertram, in extreme irritation. “Critchett ! turn that boy out !”

Marlow gets up and offers the boy a plate of pound cake.

“You are not civil to your sooty Mercury, Bertram. He offers you at this moment the most opportune illustration of

An Altruist 80

your theories. He comes on an errand of the intellect, and if a somewhat soiled messenger, he should nevertheless be treated with the respect due to a guardian of literary purity and public morality. Sweet imp! refresh your inner man!"

The boy stuffs his mouth with cake and grins.

"Are these chambers mine or yours, Lord Marlow?" asks Bertram.

"Both mine and yours, or neither yours or mine. There is no such thing as exclusive possession. You have just told us so."

"Critchett!" says Bertram, and points with stony gaze to the printer's devil, "turn that boy out of the room."

Critchett, reluctantly touching anything so sooty, takes him by the collar and drives

him before him out of the room.

Marlow picks up the torn proofs. "Who'll pay for the setting-up? asks this dear child. Unused proofs are, I suppose, first cousins to spilt milk and spoilt powder. Mayn't we read this article? The title is immensely suggestive—'Fist-right and Brain-divinity.' Are you feloniously sympathetic with the Tooting bomb?"

Bertram takes the torn proofs from him in irritation and throws them into the open drawer of a cabinet.

"The essay is addressed to persons of intelligence and with principle," he says, significantly.

"But it seems that Fanshawe has neither, if he fail to appreciate it?"

"Fanshawe has both; but

An Altruist ❷

there are occasional moments in which he recollects that he has some subscribers in Philistia."

"Fanshawe knows where his bread is buttered," chuckles the duke; "knows where his bread is buttered."

"If Fanshawe don't publish it he won't pay for it, will he?" asks Marlow, with some want of tact.

"I do not take payment for opinions," replies Bertram, *au bout des lèvres*, and much annoyed at the turn the conversation has taken.

"Most people run opinions in order to get paid for 'em," says the duke, with a chuckle.

"Why are you not in Parliament, Mr. Bertram?" asks Cicely Seymour.

"In Parliament!" repeats Bertram, with the faintness of

❧ An Altruist

horror ; incredulous that he can hear aright.

“ Well, yes ; have I said anything so very dreadful ? ”

“ Oh, my dear Cicely ! ” says Lady Southwold. “ Ever since Wilfrid came of age we have all been at him about that ; he might have had a walk over for Sax-Stoneham, or for Micklethorpe, at any election, but he would never even let himself be nominated.”

Bertram shrugs his shoulders in ineffable disgust.

“ Two Tory boroughs ! ”

“ You could have held any opinions you had chosen. Toryism is a *crépon changeant* nowadays ; it looks exactly like Radicalism very often, and only differs from it in being still more outrageous.”

“ But perhaps Mr. Bertram’s objection is to all representa-

tive government ? ” says Cicely Seymour.

Bertram glances gratefully at her. “ Precisely so, Miss Seymour.”

“ But what could you substitute ? ”

“ Oh, my dear Cicely, read his paper the *Age to Come*, and pray spare us such a discussion before dinner,” says Lady Southwold, with impatience.

“ But what would you substitute ? ” says Cicely Seymour, with persistent interest in the topic.

“ Yes ; what would you substitute ? ” asks the practical politician.

Bertram is out of temper ; these acquaintances and relatives worried him into giving this exposition of his altruistic and socialistic views, and then they

brought a fool with them like Marlow, and have turned the whole thing into a farce. To Bertram his views were the most serious things in creation. He does not choose to have them set up like croquet pegs for imbeciles to bowl at in an idle hour.

“ I would abolish *all* government,” he replies, very decidedly.

“ Oh ! ” Both the politician and Cicely Seymour look a little astonished.

“ But how then would you control people ? ”

“ Sane people do not require to be controlled.”

“ But I have heard a man of science say that only one person out of every hundred is really sane ? ”

“ We are bad judges of each other's sanity. But since you

An Altruist 56

take an interest in serious subjects," says Bertram, resting his eyes on her in approval, "I will, if you will allow me, send you some back numbers of the *Age to Come*."

"Do you mean, Wilfrid, that an obtuse world is so ungrateful as to leave you any back numbers at all?" asks Southwold.

"They will show you," continues Bertram, ignoring the interruption, "what my views and the views of those who think with me are, concerning the best method of preparing the world to meet those social changes which are inevitable for the future, those rights of the individual which are totally ignored and outraged by all present governments, whether absolute, constitutional, or, in nomenclature, republican."

“But why should we prepare to meet them when they’ll be so deucedly uncomfortable to us if they arrive, and why should we trouble about helping them onward if they’re so inevitable and cocksure in their descent on us?” says his uncle. “I asked you that question just now, and you didn’t answer me. Does one avoid an avalanche in the Alps by firing a gun to make it fall sooner than it would do if left alone?”

Critchett is meantime engaged on the expulsion of the printer’s devil by a back-stair exit, and, profiting by his absence, a little girl, who has come in at the front entrance, pushes aside the *portière* of the door and stands abashed in the middle of the room. She is eight years old, has a head of red hair, and the shrewd, watch-

An Altruist §

ing face of the London child ; she carries a penny bunch of violets. Bertram sees her entrance with extreme displeasure, not unmixed with embarrassment.

“What do you want here, Bessy?” he inquires, with scant amiability.

Bessy advances and holds out the violets.

“Annie sends these ’ere vi’lets with her love, and she’s got to go to Ealin’ for a big horder o’ mustard an’ cress, and please when’ll you be round at our place?”

Bertram is extremely annoyed.

“Run away, my good child. You see I am engaged.”

“When’ll you be round at our place?” repeats the little girl. “The pal as lodges over cousin Joe hev given us tickets for Hoxton Theayter, and

§ An Altruist

Annie says as how she'd go if you wasn't comin' in this evenin'."

"Run away, child," repeats Bertram, imperiously. "Critchett!"

Critchett, who has returned, with a demure smile, guides the steps of the reluctant Bessy from the chamber.

"Why do you let these children in, Critchett?" asks Bertram, as the valet returns.

"I beg pardon, sir," the servant says, humbly, as he lays the violets down on a *cloisonné* plate. "But you have told me, sir, that you are always at home for the Brown family."

"You might surely have more judgment, after all your years of service!" replies his master. "There are exceptions to every rule."

An Altruist

Marlow looks up to the ceiling in scandalised protest.

“Service ! Service !” he repeats. “Hear him, ye gods ! This is the rights of the individual ; the independence of the unit ; the perfect equality of one human being before another !”

Cicely Seymour looks over her shoulder at him and remarks slightly : “You are a great tease, Lord Marlow. You make me think I am in the schoolroom at Alfreton with my brothers home from Eton for Christmas. Do you really think that chaff is wit ?”

“I am not chaffing, Miss Seymour. I am in deadly earnest. This modest bunch must hold a deal of meaning. Who are the Brown family ? Where is ‘our place’ ? What is the meeting which must be

❧ An Altruist

postponed because a bloated aristocrat, rolling in ill-gotten wealth, requires that corrupting luxury known as mustard and cress ? ”

Everybody laughs, except Cicely Seymour.

“ Yes, Wilfrid,” says Lady Southwold ; “ who are the Brown family ? ”

“ To whom you are always at home,” adds his uncle.

“ And Annie who sends button-holes with love,” adds Marlow.

Bertram replies with icy brevity, “ A perfectly respectable young woman.”

“ And the respectable one’s address ? ” asks Marlow. “ Where is ‘ our place ’ ? I am seized with an irresistible longing to eat mustard and cress. I never did eat it, but still——”

An Altruist 96

Bertram eyes him very disagreeably. "The Browns are persons I esteem. I should not give their address to persons for whom I have no esteem."

"My dear Wilfrid!" cries his aunt. "How altruism does sour the temper!"

"Temper! I hope I have too much philosophy to allow my temper to be ruffled by the clumsy horse-jokes of my acquaintances."

"But why are you always at home to these Browns?"

Bertram hesitates.

"Are they acolytes? studies? pensioners?" asks his aunt.

"Is the respectable one pretty?" murmurs Marlow. "The respectable ones so uncommonly rarely are!"

He takes the violets off the *cloisonné* plate.

"A buttonhole to be worn

at Hoxton Theatre? It is an emblem of the immorality of finance: for its commercial value must be at least four farthings. If my Waterbury offend the eye of eternal justice this penny bunch must outrage it no less."

"It is quite natural, I think," says Cicely Seymour, rather impatiently, "that Mr. Bertram should have many friends in those classes which he considers so superior to his own."

"I do not say any class is superior to any other," interrupts Bertram. "I say that all are equal."

There is now a great buzz of voices everywhere in the rooms; people are so very glad to have the muzzle off after an hour's silence; he cannot doubt, as that murmur and trill of conversation run all round him,

An Altruist 96

that he has bored them all excruciatingly.

“They have no minds!” he thinks, bitterly. “We sell a bare score of copies a month of the *Age to Come*, and the *Dustcart*, with its beastly ribaldry and social scandals, sells sixty-five thousand!”

“Do you mean to say, Wilfrid,” asks his aunt, eating a caviare sandwich, “that anybody would pay taxes if they were not obliged?”

“Do not people, urged by conscience, send arrears, unasked, to the Chancellor of the Exchequer?”

“Well, they do certainly now and then. But they must be very oddly constituted people.”

“Is conscience an eccentricity?”

His aunt does not argue, she only shakes her head.

¶ An Altruist

"I can't believe anybody would pay taxes if they weren't obliged."

"But they do. There are these instances in the papers. If moral feeling in the public were acute and universal, as it ought to be, every public duty would be fulfilled with promptitude and without pressure."

The old duke nods very expressively.

"Your aunt's right," he mumbles. "Conscience-money can only come from cranks!"

"Come and dine with us, Wilfrid," says his aunt; "we never see you now. I assure you a good dinner changes the colour of political opinions in a wonderful degree. I am dreadfully afraid that you have been living on boiled soles and carrot fritters."

Bertram smiles slightly.

An Altruist 36

"The carrot fritters; not the soles. I am a vegetarian."

"But we are justified in being carnivorous," says Southwold, very eagerly. "Individualism justifies us."

Marlow repeats with emphasis: "We are justified in being carnivorous. Individualism justifies us."

"Certainly," says Bertram, with uncivil sarcasm. "The crocodile has a right to its appetites, and the cur to its vomit. Solomon said so."

"Am I the crocodile or the cur?" asks Southwold.

"Do you keep Critchett on carrot fritters?" asks Marlow, "and what does he have to drink? Hot water? Hot water is, I believe, the beverage which nowadays accompanies high thinking."

"And how do you reconcile

❧ An Altruist

your conscience and your creeds to keeping a Critchett at all?" repeats Lady Jane.

Bertram replies with distant chillness and proud humility: "The leaven of long habit is hard to get rid of; I entirely agree with you that I am in the wrong. To have a servant at all is an offence to humanity; it is an impertinence to the brotherhood of our common mortality."

"Don't be afraid," says Southwold, grimly, "our brothers and sisters in the servants' halls pay us out for the outrage; they take away our characters, read our correspondence, and pocket twenty per cent. on all our bills."

"Can you blame them? They are the product of a corrupt society. No one can blame them, whatever they are

An Altruist 96

or do. The dunghill cannot bring forth the rose. Your service has debased them. The fault of their debasement lies with you."

"But Critchett cannot be debased. He must, living in so rarefied a moral atmosphere, be elevated above all mortal weaknesses."

Bertram replies stiffly: "I can assure you I have much more respect for Critchett than for any member of a St. James' Street club."

"And yet you give him carrot fritters!" cried Lady Southwold.

Bertram replied with great irritation: "He eats whatever he pleases, turtle and turbot for aught I know. I should never presume to impose upon him either my menu or my tenets, my beliefs or my principles."

§ An Altruist

“You do wisely if you wish to keep him!” says his aunt. “I hope you *will* keep him. He is your only link with civilised life.”

Bertram smiles. “My dear aunt, when I was in the South Pacific I landed at a small island where civilisation was considered to consist in a pierced nose and a swollen belly. I do not want to be offensive, but the estimate which my age takes of its own civilisation is not very much more sensible.”

“I think it would have been better, Wilfrid, to study psychology under these savages than to publish the *Age to Come*! You could not have injured *them*, but here——”

“How illiberal you are, dear Lady Southwold,” says Cicely Seymour. “You want a course of Montaigne.”

“What’s that, Miss Seymour?” asks Marlow. “A rival to Mariani wine?”

“Yes, a French wine; very old and quite unequalled!”

Even Bertram laughs. Marlow is irritated. He does not see what he has said which is so absurd, or why his friends are laughing.

“Why do you always take that prig’s part?” he mutters, sullenly, aside to Cicely Seymour.

“I do not take any one’s part,” replies the young lady; “but I detest injustice and illiberality.”

At this moment the old duke rises with Bertram’s help, is assisted by him to find his hat and stick, and takes his departure, assuring his godson that he had been much entertained.

❧ An Altruist

Following the duke's example every one takes their leave, assuring their instructor that they have derived much entertainment and information from his disquisition. Cicely Seymour says simply and very gently : "Thanks, Mr. Bertram. You have made me your debtor for many noble thoughts."

When they have left him Bertram walks up and down his rooms dissatisfied with himself.

"What a coward !" he thinks, with the moral self-flagellation of an over-sensitive and over-sincere person. "Why could I not tell them the truth? Why did I limit myself to saying that she was a perfectly respectable young woman? If I cannot face the simple enunciation of the in-

An Altruist 80

tention, how shall I ever bring myself to the endurance of publishing the fact when it is accomplished? Am I, after all, the slave of opinion, like anybody else? Am I afraid of a set of fools who are capering on their primrose path, seeing nothing of the abyss to which it leads? If I have not the courage of my views and faiths, wherein am I superior to their philistinism? I do what I choose; what I see to be wise and right and just; I desire to give an example which shall show how utterly I despise the fictitious barriers of caste and custom, and yet I have not courage enough to say to a few people who are drinking tea in my rooms, 'My good folks, I am going to marry a young woman called Annie Brown.' Why

☞ An Altruist

could I not say it? Why was I such a miserable poltroon?"

He throws himself into a deep chair and lights a cigarette.

"What would my aunt have done? What would that grinning cad Marlow have said? What would Cicely Seymour have thought? Perhaps she would have approved. She has more sympathy, more insight than the others—and what a charming profile! And those deep blue eyes under those long thick lashes; they are eyes which have mind in them as well as youth and smiles and innocence; they are eyes which will be still beautiful when she is seventy and her hair is white under a lace mob-cap or a black satin hood. What colour are Annie's eyes? They are round and small, of

An Altruist 80

no particular colour, I think ; a reddish grey. Dear good little girl, it was not for her beauty that I selected her."

Critchett opens the door at that moment, and breaks in on his reflections.

"Mr. Fanshawe, sir."

A gentleman of no definite age, with a shrewd countenance and a significant smile, crosses the room with outstretched hand.

"My dear Wilfrid, they tell me you are in a wax about the exceptions I took to your article. I am extremely sorry to touch any single line of yours, but B.P. must be considered, you know. You are miles too advanced for this inviolate isle ; she is still shuddering at the fright which Guy Fawkes gave her."

Bertram replies stiffly : "I

❧ An Altruist

have certainly no affinity to Guy Fawkes, who was a religious person and a strict monarchist. As for the essay, pray do not trouble yourself; I shall publish it in the *Age to Come*."

"Oh, that's a pity; that will be practically putting it into the waste-paper basket; excuse me saying so, but you know the circulation of the *Age to Come* is at present—is—well—limited."

"We certainly do not chronicle scandals of the hunting-field, and devote columns to prophesying the shape of next year's bonnets, as the *Torch* does!"

"That shows you don't understand your public, or don't want to secure one. Extreme opinions, my dear boy, can only be got down the

An Altruist 80

throats of the world in a weekly journal by being adroitly sandwiched between the caviare of calumny and the butter of fashion. People hate to be made to think, my dear boy. The *Age to Come* gives 'em nothing but thinking ; and damned tough thinking too. You write with uncommon power, but you are too wholesale, too subversive ; you scare people so awfully that they stop their ears to your truths. That is not the way to secure a hearing."

" I am consistent."

" Oh, Lord ! Never be consistent. There's nothing so unpopular in life."

" I despise popularity."

" You despise bread and butter. I believe you lose twenty pound a month by your *Age to Come* ? "

“To speak more correctly,” replies Bertram, bitterly, “it gets me into debt to that amount !”

“Heaven and earth ! Why don't you drop it ?”

“It is a matter of principle.”

“Principle which will land you in Queer Street. Now, my dear Wilfrid, no man thinks more things bosh than I do, or takes more pleasure in saying so, but I combine pleasure with business ; I say my say in such a way that it brings me in eighty per cent.”

Bertram looks at him derisively.

“I have always known that your intellect was only equalled by your venality !”

Fanshawe laughs good-humouredly.

“That is neat. That is soothing. It is not difficult

An Altruist 86

to understand that you are not considered a clubbable man ! However, as you credit me with intellect, I don't mind your denying me morality. But seriously, my dear friend, you are much too violent, too uncompromising for success in journalism. Who tries to prove too much fails to prove anything, and when you bend your bow too violently it snaps and speeds no arrow. I confess that I (who am as revolutionary as most people and always disposed to agree with you) do frequently get up from the perusal of one of your articles with the unwilling conviction that it is best to let the old order of things alone. Now, that is certainly not the condition of mind which you wish to produce in your readers.

Bertram is silent. After a pause he says :

“What do you advocate, then? A cautious trimming?”

“Trimming was the name which the eighteenth-century politician gave to what we now call opportunism. All sagacious men are not opportunists, but all sagacious men endeavour to create supporters, not antagonists. Now, all violent assertion raises opposition, for human nature is cantankerous and contradictory.”

Critchett enters and hands a card on a salver. “If you please, sir, the gentleman’s waiting below ; says he sent you a letter two days ago ; gentleman’s head of the firm of Folliott and Hake, sir.”

Bertram looks vaguely about the room. “There are a good

An Altruist 56

many letters unopened. I wonder which it is?"

Fanshawe catches up a pile of letters from a writing-table and sorts them: "Here's one with 'Folliott and Hake' on the seal; how unpractical you are, dear boy!"

Bertram takes the letter and looks at it without curiosity. "It is sure to be something unpleasant. I never heard of Folliott and Hake."

Fanshawe laughs. "I have; many a time. They have been solicitors in more than one libel case, of which the *Torch* was defendant. Come, open the letter. See what it says."

Bertram opens and reads it: "Only that they have a matter of great importance to communicate to me. I really have no idea what it can be. People think so many things important

which are of infinitesimal insignificance."

"You will best correct your ignorance by allowing Mr. Folliott to enter and explain himself."

"I am so opposed to all lawyers on principle."

"So am I, as I am opposed to small-pox, or bicycle riders, or yellow fogs; but they are not to be avoided in this life, and it is neither polite or politic to keep these highly respectable solicitors waiting like sweeps. Critchett, beg Mr. Folliott to enter. I will leave you, Bertram."

"No, no; for goodness' sake stay. I may want some advice."

"You not unfrequently do. But you never follow it when given. Pray be civil."

A few moments later Mr. Folliott enters; a bland, white-

haired, portly old gentleman, a little ruffled at having been left so long at the foot of the stairs.

"I beg your pardon, Mr.—Mr.—Folliott," says Bertram, looking at the letter. "I had, in fact, not opened this note of yours. It is a bad habit I have of leaving letters unread."

"It was Sheridan's, sir," says the lawyer, pointedly. "It did not bring him good fortune."

He catches sight of Fanshawe, and his amiable countenance assumes the startled and displeased expression of a cat's face, when the cat suddenly perceives a bull terrier.

"I naturally awaited you, Mr. Bertram, or a communication from you, all the day," he says, in an affronted tone. "Hearing nothing I thought it best to come myself. You

are perhaps unaware that the Prince of Viana is dead."

"I never heard of the individual," says Bertram. "Who was he?"

"He was your first cousin. You may know him better as the son of Mr. Horace Errington."

"Oh! The son of my mother's brother? We never knew him. There was a family feud."

"But you will remember to have heard that his father made great wealth in the Abruzzi through copper mines, was nationalised, and was ennobled by Victor Emmanuel. The family feud was chiefly on account of his connection with commerce and his change of country."

"Precisely."

"I regret to inform you that

your cousin is dead, at thirty-three years of age, killed by a wild boar when hunting in the Pontine marshes ; he has left you, Mr. Bertram, his sole and exclusive heir."

Bertram stares at him.

"What ! you must be joking, Mr. Folliott !"

The old gentleman takes off his gold spectacles and puts them on again in extreme irritation.

"I am not in the habit of joking, sir, either in business or outside it. We were solicitors to his father and to himself. We drew up this will five years ago. You are inheritor of an immense fortune, Mr. Bertram."

Bertram stands staring at him, then turns to Fanshawe. "Do you hear ? Is it true ? Surely, no one could insult me so greatly, even in jest ?"

"I really do not understand," says the lawyer, bewildered. "What insult can there be? I am speaking, sir, in most sober earnest."

"Shall I fan you, Wilfrid? or send for some sal volatile?" says Fanshawe, derisively. "Don't be an ass," he adds in a whisper. "This sensible old fellow will think it his duty to shut you up in a private mad-house, if you talk like that. Pull yourself together, and answer him sensibly."

Mr. Folliott surveys the speaker as a timid person may look at a lion riding on a velocipede in a circus-ring.

"If Mr. Bertram would place me in communication with his solicitor matters would be facilitated," he murmurs.

"I have no solicitors," re-

plies Bertram. "If you will pardon what may seem an offensive opinion, I regard all men of law as poisonous parasites growing on the rotten trunk of a society which has the axe of retribution laid at its roots."

Mr. Folliott is too astonished to be offended : "I fail to follow you, sir, but I have no doubt you mean something very profound. Your cousin did not, I imagine, read your articles in the reviews, but I have read one or two of them. However, notwithstanding your extraordinary opinions, you are a man of birth and breeding, and must, in a measure, be a man of the world, sir. You must know that you must allow me to fulfil my office. This will has to be proved and probate taken out."

❧ An Altruist

“Where is the necessity?”

“Be so good as not to play with me. You must accept the inheritance or decline it. In event of your refusal, of your formal and final refusal, the whole of this property is to go to the testator’s old college at Oxford—Magdalen College.”

“Ah! that is a consolation.”

“Why so, sir?”

“Because, although I have no sympathy with the modern movements at Oxford, and consider that she has fallen away from her original high mission, yet she is, and always will be, a seat of learning; and the Humanities will never wholly be banished from her halls.”

“Again, I fail to follow you sir.”

“I mean that such an alternative destination for the pro-

An Altruist §6

perty will enable me to decline it with a clear conscience."

"Really, sir, your replies are wholly unintelligible."

Bertram turns helplessly to Fanshawe. "Explain to this gentleman my views regarding property."

"I am aware of some of them, sir," replies the solicitor, sententiously.

"You read the *Torch*, Mr. Folliott, don't you?" says the proprietor of the *Torch*.

"When my professional duties compel me, sir."

"But the *Torch* is milk for lambs, Mr. Folliott, beside the *Age to Come*."

The solicitor bows with an expression which indicates that he would prefer to remain unacquainted with the *Age to Come*.

"But pardon me," continues

❧ An Altruist

Fanshawe, "is my friend here really so immensely in luck's way?"

"He inherits under the Prince of Viana's will all properties, both English and Italian," replies the lawyer, with the cat's expression more accentuated on his countenance.

"And they are very large?"

"Very large. My late client was an only son, and though generous, never spendthrift."

Fanshawe touches Bertram's arm. "Wake up, Wilfrid. Do you hear? Can't you speak?"

Bertram says wearily, "What am I to say? It is an unspeakably awful thing. I really cannot bring myself to believe in it."

"If you will allow me," says the solicitor, "to make you acquainted with some details of the——"

An Altruist §

“To what end? Do the items of the contents of the pack interest the pack-horse to whose aching back the burden is offered?”

“Again I fail to follow you.”

“To follow him, Mr. Folliott,” says Fanshawe, “requires a long course of patient perusal of the *Age to Come*.”

“Quite so, quite so,” answers the solicitor, coldly, in a tone which intimates that he will not have that patience. “I have certainly never seen the announcement of an inheritance received in such a manner.”

“But why,” says Bertram—
“why did this relative, whom I never knew, leave his property to me?”

“I cannot tell, sir. It was certainly not by the advice of our firm.”

“Are there any conditions

attached to this extraordinary bequest?"

"None, sir. You can realise at once and invest everything in dynamite and pyretic acid," replies the solicitor, with a rasping scorn showing through the velvet of his admirable manners.

"Oh, my dear sir! Can you fall into the vulgar error of confounding collectivism and altruism with anarchy? They are as far apart as the Poles. One is love; the other hatred."

"I confess, sir, that such love nauseates me. I prefer of the two the hatred. But I am an old-fashioned person, and I know little of literature later than the 'Sixties."

"A most debased period in every form of production."

"It may be so. Macaulay was alive in it and Tennyson

An Altruist §

But I did not come here to discuss the characteristics of generations. I came to inform you of an event which I immaturally concluded would appear to you both important and agreeable."

"You did not know me, my dear sir."

"I did not, sir."

With a little cough and a little stately bow the old gentleman prepares to leave, with the cat's glance at the bull terrier still more hostile and more scared.

"You will be so good, sir, as to call on us to-morrow morning, or to send some representative authorised by you. You must be aware that the law requires you either to accept the bequest or decline it."

"I am criminal if I accept : I may be equally criminal if I reject it."

§ An Altruist

“Again I fail to follow you, sir. But of course you are your own master ; and in the event of your failure to call on us to-morrow morning you will be so good as to make us acquainted with your decision and intentions.”

“I will send you, Mr. Fanshawe,” replies Bertram.

The solicitor does not look everjoyed at the promise, but bows in silence, a very stiff and formal bow, and leaves the room without more words.

“I am afraid I was not very polite to him,” says Bertram, doubtfully, when the stuffs of the *portière* have fallen behind him.

“You certainly were not,” replies Fanshawe. “I think you could give hints to Whistler on the Gentle Art of making Enemies. But why

An Altruist 85

did you talk all that rot? He only ridiculed you for it."

"I merely said what I meant."

"You mean to let this fortune go to Magdalen College?"

"Unless I change my present intentions very completely."

"Oh, Lord! This is green sickness, moonstruck madness; Hamlet's monomania was nothing to it. Are you absolutely insensible to the fact that you would be able to print ten million copies of the *Age to Come* every week and distribute them gratis all over Great Britain every week?"

"Even that alluring prospect cannot tempt me. My acceptance of a fortune would be as anomalous as Lord Rosebery's creation of peers. Miserable creatures that we are, we are

only tolerably respectable so long as we are commonly consistent."

"Oh, Lord save us! You can't possibly be serious?"

"I speak in entire sincerity."

"A very dangerous thing to do at any time. People have such a shocking habit of taking one at one's word! Old Folliott's very shrewd too, though he's a Tory."

"What is his shrewdness to me?"

"Well, if you retain him as your man of business it may be a great deal. It is usual to retain the testator's solicitors when they are as eminent and irreproachable as Folliott and Hake."

Bertram grows impatient.

"Cannot you understand? I do not take this property. Do not dream of taking it for a single instant!"

An Altruist

“You can’t be such a transcendent ass! Excuse me, but——”

“I should have thought *you* would have looked at this matter as I do.”

“Dear boy, all property *ought* to be abolished, on that we are quite agreed, but whilst it still exists in this piggish world we are bound in duty to ourselves and our neighbours to make the best of it, and get as much as we can!”

“Then you are a mere sham? A humbug? A hypocrite?”

“You mean to be rude, but I take no offence. Everybody is insincere in civilised countries.”

“What an infamous theory! I have always thought that your Richmond villa, your house at Prince’s Gate, your swell garden parties, your blood

§ An Altruist

horses, and all the rest of it, were ludicrously out of keeping with your political and literary declarations of opinion."

"Not more so than your silver tea-set and your exemplary Critchett are with yours. Don't let us quarrel, at least not until to-morrow. I want to see more of old Folliott. He is one of the worst enemies I have, and I do so delight in drawing the claws of an enemy with my bland and benign manners. Besides, I owe him a good deal. The *Torch* was in its infancy when he made its fortune and set it on its legs by his libel suits. Meet me in Hyde Park at eleven to-morrow. I'll come out of my house through Albert Gate, and we'll go down to his office together."

"You can go, and take my written refusal with you."

An Altruist 26

Fanshawe gives a gesture of irritated impatience, and looks at his watch.

“*La nuit porte conseil.* You will think differently in the morning. I am dining at Richmond. I can't stay another moment, but for Heaven's sake take till to-morrow to think it over Ta-ta!”

“Good-day.”

Bertram looks out of the window and watches Fanshawe's private hansom flash down Piccadilly ; he vaguely wishes that he too were going to dine at Richmond, and were not fettered by principle to a cheese omelette and a vol au vent of mushrooms.

It is a fine, breezy sunshiny morning on the morrow, good yachting weather, as some one says who is going down to Gravesend for the first cutter race of the season.

❧ An Altruist

Bertram walks along Rotten Row under the trees with a mind so preoccupied that he narrowly escapes being knocked down by an ambassadress on a bicycle. He is repeating to himself what he said to the old duke, "*fais ce que dois advienne que pourra,*" and he is conscious that the injunction has its thorny side like most other virtuous things.

He has been unable to sleep all night for the tormenting visions evoked by Folliott's visit and his dead cousin's bequest.

Because you valorously resist a temptation it does not any the less sharply assail you. Because you limit yourself strictly to rice croquettes you do not the less painfully recall the forbidden flavour of a salmi of game. He considers it no

An Altruist 90

more possible for him in common decency to accept this property than to embrace Mahomedanism or renounce clothing ; but none the less is he haunted by the possibilities that its possession would bring with it.

He is human, and his heart is heavy as he walks along in the pleasant April wind. He realises that there are many charming things which he has renounced—voluntarily renounced, indeed ; but, then, is it really more agreeable to kill oneself than to be killed? Anyhow, the result is the same ; the grave is as deep and the sleep as eternal.

When he has arrived opposite the residential hotel which raises the colossal offence of its eleven stories between the elm-trees and their right to air and light

¶ An Altruist

he sits down, feeling rather limp and aimless ; and lighting a cigarette, he awaits the coming of Fanshawe. There is a policeman close at hand ; some children are near, with their nurses ; and a respectable - looking, middle-aged, brisk woman, with some fine linen in a flat basket, is approaching. He raises his hat to her.

“Is that you, Mrs. Brown? I never saw you in the Park before.”

“No, sir, I don't often come nigh fine folks,” answers Mrs. Brown. “But I've got to go to Prince's Gate, number fifteen, and I turned in 'ere 'cos the traffic's that crowded on the 'igh-road ; 'is 'Ighness is agoin' down to 'Ounslow.”

“Oh, to be sure. How are your people this morning?”

“My pore legs, sir, be as bad

An Altruist ❷

as ever—but there, we pore folks can't stop for aches and pains, or we'd never do naught in this 'ere world; 'twasn't made for the likes of us."

"That is a sad reflection. But pray don't say 'sir' to me."

"It comes nat'ral, sir. I hev allus been one as did my humble duty to the quality."

"Oh, I know! It is this terrible servility which has entered like blood-poisoning into the very marrow of the people."

The policeman standing near listening grins behind his white-gloved hand.

"You are so used to stoop and cringe that you have lost the power to stand upright when you are invited to do so," says Bertram, impatiently. "Where is your daughter?"

§ An Altruist

“Annie’s at Ealing, sir. It’s Primrose Day to-morrow.”

“And what is your opinion of Primrose Day, Mrs. Brown?”

“Well, sir, it’s got ’em lots o’ votes, but it do seem to me a pack o’ folly. No offence.”

“And the Primrose Dames, Mrs. Brown?”

“Well, sir, they’re a pretty spry lot o’ ladies, and they come and talk, talk, talk, and me at the mangle, and I wish ’em anywheres; and one o’ ’em promised to have my kitchen boiler looked to, but, Lord! that’s three months ago come Monday was a week, and nobody’s come to the boiler.”

“The Conservative party always forgets the boilers; and are extremely astonished when the neglected boilers blow up.”

“My boiler was no business

An Altruist §

o' theirs," says the good woman, hotly ; " but if they said they'd send, they hought to hev sent. But there ! that's them ladies all over, in and out, and to and fro, and it's how's my soul ? and how's my dust-bin ? and hev I faith ? and hev I a patent kitchener ? and do I read my Bible ? and do I keep the traps on my drains ? and do I see the blessin's o' eddication ? and do I keep my sink flushed ? and am I an abstainer ? and do I use carbolic acid ? Such a pack o' nonsense, and in they comes without rappin' ; and if they sees a bit o' dust in a corner 'tis ' Lord, Mrs. Brown, don't ye know as dust is microbes, and microbes is sar-tain death ? ' And I says, says I, ' No, marm, my leddy, my granny lived to ninety-six, and on her ninetieth birthday she

§ An Altruist

walked four miles to market at Winchester and back, and she allus said to all o' us as dust was wholesome, and cobwebs too, and shouldn't ne'er be interfered with——' ”

She stops, out of breath, and the listening policeman smiles again.

“ People were more robust in those days, Mrs. Brown,” remarked Bertram.

“ Yes, sir, there weren't so many doctors all over the place. When I was a gal, in our village there weren't a doctor within twenty mile ; and nobody never was ill. Nowadays young and old is allus talking about their livers and lights till they fret theirselves into sickness.”

“ That is very possible. Science is much to blame for teaching humanity to concen-

trate the mind on the body. There I wholly agree with you."

Mrs. Brown picks up her load of linen, which she has momentarily rested on the back of the bench.

"Well, sir, you'll please excuse me, but I can't stand chatterin' here. We pore has got our work to do. That's what I says to them ladies when they come botherin.' I says, says I, 'We pore has our work to do, and when 'tis done we want to sit still, and put our feet up, and take a cup o' tea, and doze like; we don't want to go strammarkin' about to your concerts, and your readin's, and your mothers' meetin's, and all them rubbishes, and see a duchess playin' a banjo or hear a duke sing "Hot Codlins."' Let 'em keep in their place, and we'll keep in ours.

That's what I says, sir, and I bring up my children to say it arter me."

"Oh, I am aware, Mrs. Brown, you and those who resemble you, are a terrible stumbling-block to progress."

"Please don't call me names, sir. I'm a pore workin' woman, but I'm one as hev allus kep' my head above water. You're in one speer, and we're in another, as I hev allus told ye, but all the same I choose to be respecket."

"My dear creature, no one can respect you more profoundly than I do."

But Mrs. Brown is not appeased by this assurance; walks away in high dudgeon; there is meanwhile a great noise of yelling and shouting in the distance near the statue of Achilles.

An Altruist §

“What are they doing?” Bertram asks of the constable, who, touching his helmet, answers :

“Well, sir, the Salvationists have got new banners, ‘Glory’ on one side, and ‘Eternal Fire’ on t’other; and the pop’lace don’t like ’em. Pop’lace very queer and touchy, sir. Never knows what it wants.”

“That is a hasty condemnation to pass on those who form the bulwarks of a nation.”

“Bulwarks, is it, sir? Not when they’ve got any beer in ’em.”

The uproar in the distance grows very loud indeed ; some children are alarmed ; the nurse who is with them asks the policeman if there is any danger of a riot.

He replies cheerfully, “No fear, mum. They’re round

An Altruist

Hachilles ; the Salvationists are on one side, a rum chap hollering against property on the other. He's one o' them Communists, and the pop'lace don't cotton to them ideas ; pop'lace likes gentlefolks. Lord ! see 'em run to stare at the carriages o' Drawing Room days ! ”

“ What is the use,” thinks Bertram, “ of trying to save sheep who carry their own fleeces obstinately to the shearers ? ”

“ This is the impression,” he asks of the policeman, “ which years on the London pavement gives you of the London populace ? ”

Policeman answers, drily, “ Yessir. All the force'll tell ye the same. London populace likes the nobs. Some on 'em yell a lot o' revolutionary non-

An Altruist ୨୦

sense when they gets in Trafalgar Square, but, Lord bless ye, they don't mean it."

"They will mean it one day."

"Well, sir, if they ever run short o' liquor, on account of them total habstainers, they will."

"What a view of the sovereign people!" says Bertram, who in the *Age to Come* advocates voluntary total abstinence."

"Sovereign, is it, sir? Ever seen 'em o' Derby Day, sir?"

"Yes," replies Bertram, curtly. He perceives that the constable is a satirist.

In sight at that moment appears a struggling form being violently propelled by two officers of the law, and followed by some yelling roughs and capering boys.

§ An Altruist

Bertram cannot believe his senses.

“Good gracious ! That is Hopper !” he says to the satirical policeman at his side. “What are they doing to him ? Why is he arrested ? ”

Policeman replies politely, but with slightly veiled contempt : “Seem to be running him in, sir. Is he a protegy of yours ? ”

Bertram goes up to the prisoner : “Why, Hopper, is that you ? What has he done ? Why do you collar him like that ? ”

The constables, who are dragging Hopper between them, reply with curt contempt : “Disorderly ; drunk and disorderly, that’s what he is, sir, and incitin’ to crime.”

“Drunk ? ” repeats Bertram. “Hopper ? Impossible ! He

An Altruist 80

has touched nothing but lemonade and mineral water for three years ! ”

“ Is that so, sir ? Well, there’s an excuse for him, then, poor devil ! ”

The prisoner whines and weeps, “ Is that you, Mr. Bertram ? You’ll speak for a pore honest man—for a pore honest man—not a drop hev Hopper took—not a—not a—not a drop. Hark’ee, Mister—Hopper was a-tellin’ folks—good tidings—propuppy’s pison—propuppy’s thievin’—propuppy’s root o’ all evil—said so yerself, mister. Hopper used yer werry words. And Hopper’s run in, and ye stand there—yah ! Blackgud.”

“ I am ashamed of you, Hopper,” says Bertram, sternly. “ But,” he adds to the constables, “ if you arrest this man

§ An Altruist

for having taken stimulants, I cannot oppose the measure, he may deserve arrest ; but if you consider him guilty because he has merely striven to disseminate the doctrines which I myself hold, I ought in common justice to accompany him and be locked up as well."

The first policeman, who has a satiric vein, smiles rather cynically : " Well, sir, I don't say as you shouldn't, but we can't run you in, sir ; you aren't disorderly."

Marlow, who is sauntering past, stops, and laughs : " His opinions are very disorderly. Half an hour in Bow Street might be a seasonable douche."

Hopper is struggling between the two constables, who have him by the collar : " Hi, mister ! " he groans, " won't ye speak hup for a 'onest man ?

An Altruist §

Kep' me on beastly swills, you hev—kep' promisin' on me beer'd be free all round—promised as 'ow I'd live in Windsor Castle, and hev ale an' gin on tap all day—promised as 'ow—promised as 'ow—promised as 'ow——”

“Shut up his jaw,” says one of the constables to the other. “Get him along somehow. We can't waste no more time.”

They go down the road, dragging and pushing Hopper, a group of small boys dancing hilariously in their rear.

“I assure you he was an entirely reformed character, up to this moment,” says Bertram to the satirical and remaining policeman.

“Aye, they're allus the worst, sir,” says that functionary, with conviction.

“Reformed characters have

☛ An Altruist

a knack of backsliding," says Marlow, who has lingered to look on, with great enjoyment of the scene. "Vice is magnetic. Virtue isn't—somehow."

Bertram ignores him and continues to address the policeman : "I suppose I can witness on his behalf in the police court? Get him out on bail? My testimony surely——"

"Well, sir, I'd let him bide if I was you," says the policeman, without a grain of sympathy. "Seven days'll do him a world o' good. Wonderful how it sobers 'em."

"Why are you so ungenerous to your own class?"

Policeman looks puzzled : "Don't know about ongenerous, sir ; but I didn't never cotton to drunkards afore I was in the force."

"I thought you were a total

An Altruist §

abstainer, Bertram? ” says Marlow.

Bertram replies, very stiffly : “ Drink is the most disgusting of all weaknesses, but our disgust ought not to destroy our compassion. In that poor man yonder it is a relapse into a bad habit after three years of rigorous abstinence.”

The policeman smothers a decorous smile : “ Beg pardon, sir that 'ere man was run in dead drunk a fortnight ago on the Nottin' 'Ill road and got two days.”

Bertram is silent.

He remembers that Hopper appeared at his chambers ten days previously with a black eye and bandaged head, and accounted for his condition by a very well-told episode of a runaway horse and a lady saved by his courage and resolution.

❧ An Altruist

Marlow laughs, nods, and walks on ; Bertram lights another cigarette. He is not pleased by this episode.

Marlow, meanwhile continuing his walk, comes, some tenth part of a mile further down the road, on two ladies, whom he recognises immediately although their backs are towards him ; one is Cicely Seymour, the other Lady Jane Rivaux. He overtakes them with as much haste and joyousness as it is possible for a London man in the 'Nineties to display in public.

"Oh, Miss Seymour, such a lark down there," he says, with great satisfaction. "A friend of Bertram's run in dead drunk by the police, and Bertram preaching red ruin on his behalf. On my word, it's the drollest sight I've seen for many a day."

"It must be," replied Cicely,

An Altruist 56

between her teeth. "We have all of us numbers of friends who take more stimulants than are good for them, but they are careful to be in the sanctuary of their own houses or in their clubs."

"How you do pull up a fellow!" murmurs Marlow. "Of course, when I say friend I mean a—a—well, one of his monstrous queer acquaintances. He lives amongst that class."

"What class?"

"Well, the—the mob—you know. Folks that come out when there's a riot and smash windows and lamps; never see 'em any other time; burrow, I suppose, like rabbits."

"Darkest London? I fear the lamps when they are not smashed do not throw much light on their darkness."

"How sententious you are,

Cicely ! ” says Lady Jane. “ You ought to marry a rising politician.”

“ Because I detest politics ? ”

“ Bertram’s views aren’t politics, they’re red ruin,” repeats Marlow. “ Red ruin to himself, too ; he’s dropped such a pot o’ money over that revolutionary journal of his that he’ll be in the bankruptcy court before the season’s over.”

“ Has he borrowed any money of you ? ” asks Cicely, curtly.

“ Oh dear, no ; I didn’t mean to imply—— ”

“ Then what are his affairs to you ? ”

“ Well—I—I—don’t know. Mustn’t one talk of one’s neighbours ? ”

“ It shows great poverty of mind to speak merely of people. There are so many other subjects.”

An Altruist §6

Marlow is abashed.

He knows that his mind is not rich according to her ideas of intellectual wealth.

“At all events,” he says, rather crossly and hotly, “one may be allowed to envy such a prig such good luck as to have Miss Seymour for a champion.”

“Jane,” says Cicely, turning to her friend, “here come your children. How well that mite Dolly rides !”

“He *is* a prig, you know, my dear,” murmurs Lady Jane, “and I am sorry it makes you angry when we say so.”

“I dislike all injustice,” says Cicely, coldly, “and I do not consider that Mr. Bertram is in the least done justice to by his friends and relations. How badly every one treated him yesterday in return for a most learned and interesting lecture !”

❧ An Altruist

While she is thus defending himself and his doctrines in his absence, Bertram, still seated under the trees, sees in the distance a girl's figure ; she wears a black straw hat, a black jacket, and a grey stuff skirt ; she has thread gloves and leather high-lows, the highlows are white with dust ; she has two deep baskets filled with primroses and covered by red cotton handkerchiefs ; she carries one on each arm. She has a round, fair, freckled face, a sweet and cheerful expression, and a fringe of naturally curling brown hair.

She approaches Bertram smiling : "Oh, gracious, sir ! Don't get up for the likes of me. Mother told me as how you were under this tree ; I just met her by the Gate, so I thought I'd come and have a peep at you."

An Altruist 36

"Thanks," replies Bertram, distantly. "Don't say 'as how,' Annie. You are heavily laden this morning."

"Oh, no, sir. Primroses have no roots; they make a fine show, but they don't weigh naught."

"Like the party of which they are the emblem."

Annie smiles, in entire ignorance of his meaning, and sits down by him, planting her baskets on the ground.

"These aren't very good flowers," she says, regretfully, "the rain's spiled 'em. They'll do to put at the horses' ears. Why do they put 'em at the horses' ears, sir? I asked a groom onst, and he says, says he, it means that when our party come back to office we'll take the tax off horses. Is that so, sir?"

§ An Altruist

“They are not only at the horses’ ears, but at the asses’ buttonholes!” says Bertram. “As for taxation, it is the arc of Toryism.”

“Dear me!” he thinks, “why will she sit down by me? With all the will in the world one cannot but fret occasionally at their manners, though of course manner is only the shell, and ought not to weigh with one!”

Annie is meanwhile making some primroses up into a bunch. “What had you said to mother?” she asks. “Her back was quite set up, like.”

“Your mother,” replies Bertram, “is the most estimable and indefatigable of persons, but she has the taint of painfully narrowed and archaic views: she persists in considering herself of an inferior class;

An Altruist 50

she persists in speaking of 'quality,' by which she means the patrician order, as something superhuman and alien to herself. It distresses me."

"Oh, yes! Mother's always going on about our engagement. She says as how——"

" 'As how,' again, Annie! "

"Well, sir, that's just what mother means. You speak in one way and I in another. And your friends will laugh at my way of speaking, sir; they certainly will."

"Let them laugh! Besides, we shall not see them, Annie; we shall live wholly apart from them, in some remote spot of our own."

"Out o' London, sir? "

"Out of London beyond a doubt. Is that any subject of regret? "

"Well—I should miss the streets, sir."

❧ An Altruist

“Miss the streets ! Merciful heavens ! To what a pass has the baneful disease of town life brought a pure and unsophisticated soul ! But you have been in the country this morning early—the hem of the country at any rate. Did the freshness, the silence, the fragrance around you say nothing to your heart ? ”

“Well, no, sir. Where the growers are you don’t smell much else than manure ; and there’s a steam pump always going fit to deafen you.”

“Well, well ! But you must have seen the real country. I have taken you myself to Bushey and Thames Ditton. Surely you must see that the streets are the quintessence of vulgarity, of artificiality, of hideousness, of ludicrous effort ? ”

“If they’re as bad as that,

An Altruist 50

sir, why do all the great ladies stay all the summer in 'em, when they might be in the country? Our little street ain't much, for sure, but there's a deal o' neighbourliness in it; and I'm so used to listening for Sam's growler rattlin' home I don't think sleep 'ud come to me without it."

"We really cannot take Sam and his cab into our wedded life," remarks Bertram, with irritation; "and why will you say 'sir,' and not Wilfrid?"

"Your Christian name would sound so cheeky, sir," replies Annie. "I couldn't bring myself to say it. You're so different to me, sir. That's what mother allus says: 'Mr. Bertram's got queer notions,' says she; 'but he was born of the quality, and quality he'll be till he die, let him fuss and

❧ An Altruist

fad and fettle as much as ever he likes.' "

Bertram is looking uneasily down the Mile : " Won't your primroses wither in the sun ? "

" No ; there's the shade o' the tree."

Bertram says to himself : " However shall I get rid of her ? If Marlow should come back while she's sitting here, or Fanshawe come out of his house ! " (*Aloud.*) " Dear Annie, if you won't misunderstand me, I think we'd better not be seen sitting here together. Cæsar's wife—no, I don't mean that, I mean an Englishman's betrothed—in fact, you know what I mean. It was very kind of you to send those violets yesterday, but it was a mistake—my rooms were full—people laughed."

" Oh, Mr. Bertram, I am

An Altruist 36

sorry. It was silly, of course, now I think of it," says the girl, as she rises and takes up the baskets. "Mr. Bertram, if you don't like to be seen with me settin' on this bench, how ever will you stand being seen with me all your life?"

"You don't comprehend," replies Bertram, nervously. "That isn't the question at all. I don't want people to say coarse and rude things of you. Of my wife no one will ever dare to do so."

Annie hangs her head in silence for a minute; then murmurs:

"Do you really love me, sir? Mother says as how it's moonshine."

"I dislike the word love. It is coarse, and implies coarse feelings. It is a degrading impulse, shared with the beasts

§ An Altruist

of the fields. Poets are responsible for having covered its unloveliness with a starry garment which has disguised—fatally disguised—its nakedness. What I feel for you is respect, esteem, the sweetness of fulfilled duty, the means of proving to the world the sincerity of my sociology.”

“Yes, sir. You told me that afore.”

“Well, what better sentiment can you desire? Love fills lunatic asylums, divorce courts, cemeteries, heats charcoal braziers, fires revolvers, gives human bodies to fishes ; but such a sentiment as I have for you purifies society, advances civilisation, ensures mutual respect, and eliminates passion, the tyrant of man.”

He stops abruptly, for before his memory floats the vision of

An Altruist 56

Cecily Seymour, and he seems to hear her saying : “ What heresy ! And how untrue ! ”

Annie murmurs, keeping her head down, and in a disappointed voice : “ Yes, sir.”

“ You do not seem to understand ! You are vexed ? ”

“ I’ll try to understand, sir. I’m only a poor girl, and all that you say is very beautiful, I dessay ; but—it makes me think of a novel I got onst from the library, where a poor governess, without a umberellar or a friend, stands out in the rain and looks through the winder at a cosy kitchen, where they’re a-toastin’ muffins for tea, and a cat’s a-warming hisself at the fire.”

“ ‘ Jane Eyre.’ I fail to see the connection.”

“ Well, Mr. Bertram, I say it ill ; but when you talk in

§ An Altruist

that kind o' way it makes me feel out in the cold like as that poor teacher was, and I think I'd rather have the fire and the muffins and the cat."

"I fear you are a sad Philistine, Annie."

"I don't know what that is, sir. I daresay as it's only that your beautiful talk's too fine for me. I think I'll go now. I didn't ought to have dawdled here."

"You are crying, child !"

"Oh, no, sir."

She gets up and hurries away.

"O Heavens !" Bertram says to himself. "One does not go to that sturdy class to get a sensitive plant that droops at a touch. She says *liberry* and *umberellar*. It is absurd that such a trifle should irritate one, but it does ; it is like a grain of

An Altruist 56

dust in one's eye, a crumb of bread in one's sock. What atoms they are, yet how miserable they can make one! And then her absolute inability to understand one! Love! Good gracious! She would want to have a bride cake from Gunter's; a temple of Hymen in spun sugar!"

The remembrance of Cicely Seymour's fair face, with its tender, dreamy eyes and its beautiful mouth, comes over him. He shivers in the warmth of the pleasant and unusual sunshine.

Marlow, who has left the ladies after his snubbing, passes him again, puts his glass in his eye, and gazes after Annie Brown.

"A *protégée*? Younger than your disciples usually are," he remarks. "Ah, to

❧ An Altruist

be sure — that must be the Annie of the violets? My dear Bertram, surely chivalry should suggest that we should carry her baskets for her? If you will take the one, I will take the other.”

Bertram deigns no answer. He feels considerably annoyed, and gazes at the cupola of the hotel in front of him.

Marlow digs holes in the gravel with his cane.

“What an opportunity lost of practical illustration of your doctrines, and — she’s got a smart pair of ankles ; rather thick, but still——”

Bertram continues to gaze abstractedly at the hotel roof.

“But why, oh why, let her wear highlows?” continues Marlow. “They would deform a goddess.”

Suddenly, with the sense of

An Altruist §6

taking a plunge into water of unknown depth, the man whom he torments faces what he considers an imperative obligation.

"The young person in the highlows is my future wife," he says between his teeth. "You will be so good as to make your jokes about some other matter than her ankles."

Marlow stares, utterly incredulous and stupefied.

"Good Lord ! you can't mean it ! Your wife ? Why, she is—she is—she is a very decent sort of girl no doubt ; I should be sorry to imply the contrary, but——"

"Be so good as to understand that I am not in jest. That is the—the—the daughter of the people who I am about to marry."

"Oh, Lord !"

Marlow drops into a chair,

§ An Altruist .

so astonished that he could not recover his speech. Annie is too far off to hear, and there is no one else within earshot except a groom on the other side of the rails ; the policeman has gone on down the road.

“I was much to blame,” says Bertram, in his chilliest manner, “not to make the announcement yesterday when you asked who were the Brown family. My reticence was a weakness of which I am sincerely ashamed.”

He has done what he believes that courage, truth, and loyalty to this poor little girl with the primrose skips demanded, but doing our duty, unhappily, is apt to leave a shivery and prickly sensation behind it, and his reasons do not, even to himself, appear so logical, admirable, and clear as they had done three months ago.

An Altruist §6

And why will she say "*liberry*" and "*umberellar*"? and her ankles certainly are thick! He tries to remember Sybil in Disraeli's romance of that name, but he cannot conceal from his mind that Annie is not in the very least like Sybil, if he himself somewhat resembles Egremont.

"And may I tell people?" asks Marlow, with his eyes staring wide open.

"You may tell every one. The office of bellman to society is, I believe, very congenial to you."

"Eh? Lord, how they will laugh! They'll die of laughin'."

Bertram reddens angrily.

"No doubt they will laugh. Such laughter is still as like the crackling of thorns under a pot as it was in the days of Solomon."

☛ An Altruist

Marlow continues to stare stupidly.

"Are you sure you aren't jokin' ? chaffin' ? humbuggin' ?" he asks.

"I do not joke," replies Bertram, with chill dignity. "And certainly I should not use banter on so delicate and solemn a subject. If you think the actions of my insignificant personality will amuse people, you are at liberty to amuse them."

With that he nods slightly, and walks towards the French Embassy, leaving Marlow rooted to his chair, still staring with a blank expression of incredulity and amaze.

"And that prig, that dolt, that triple idiot might marry Cicely Seymour if he chose !" mutters the young man with the gold crook of his cane between his teeth.

An Altruist 56

Marlow cannot believe his own senses. It is eleven o'clock in the morning, and he has taken nothing but some black coffee and a devilled kidney, or he really would think he had been drinking, and forgotten the debauch.

He feels that it would be very agreeable to his feelings to return to barbarian methods and pound into a jelly the highly cultured brains of the author of the *Age to Come*.

"But what do you marry her for?" he shouts after Bertram's retreating figure. He receives no answer, and Bertram passes away under the budding April boughs. To explain his reasons to Marlow would be indeed to throw pearls before swine.

As he walks backward in the direction of Hyde Park

§ An Altruist

Corner he sees the figure of Annie Brown going down the almost-deserted roadway of the drive.

“Her ankles *are* thick,” he thinks painfully ; “and why will she use such very odd words as “*liberry*” ? Why ? I believe philologists consider that the vernacular of the illiterate is the purest Saxon English spoken ; but it grates unpleasantly on one’s ears. Is that you, Fanshawe, at last ? ”

Fanshawe, who has come out of his house, which is near to the French Embassy, fixes his eyeglass on the retreating figure of the unconscious Annie. He is of a supernatural quickness of observation.

Bertram, to his vexation, feels extreme embarrassment. He knows he ought to repeat to Fanshawe the confession just

An Altruist §6

made to Marlow, but he cannot ; it sticks in his throat like a fish bone. The eyes of the potent editor are malicious and inexorable.

“ I saw you from my bedroom window sitting with that young daughter of the sovereign people,” remarks Fanshawe. “ I wished for a Kodak. The *Torch* should have had an illustrated Easter number.”

“ You are fifty minutes late,” says Bertram, irritably.

“ My dressing-gown and chocolate pot are dear to me.”

“ You always turn night into day.”

“ Night is day in London, as coal and electricity are its summer. Well, sha’n’t we take a hansom to Folliott’s ? ”

“ Wait a moment, Fanshawe. Sit down here.”

Fanshawe complies reluc-

§ An Altruist

tantly. "Why waste time? Let's go and settle your inheritance."

"Please go instead of me and say that I refuse. It is very simple."

"It is simple indeed! So was the remark of 'Tom's a cold'; and just about as reasonable. My dear Bertram! *La nuit porte conseil*, and yet you still wish to refuse?"

"Yes, I refuse; and——"

He pauses, then swallows the fish bone desperately.

"And—I am going to marry yonder daughter of the people!"

"Ah! Rumour for once is correct, then?" says the gentleman, to whom the amplification and publication of Rumour brings in £40,000 per annum.

"Yes, I marry the young woman you saw when you wished for a Kodak."

An Altruist §6

For once Fanshawe has not a syllable to say : he is dumb.

“ You look astonished,” remarks Bertram. “ Yet with your principles——”

“ Principles be damned ! ” says Fanshawe. “ They must go to the wall when they trample on common sense.”

“ But surely for you no class divisions exist ? ” says Bertram, with some maliciousness. “ Therefore of course you will congratulate me as warmly as if my future wife were that abominable thing a duke’s daughter.”

“ There ought to be no race-horses, but while there are we put our money on them,” replied Fanshawe. “ We must take the world as it is, or cut our throats in it. You are cutting yours with a bowie knife. I will return to my chocolate pot.”

An Altruist 50

At that instant Mrs. Brown comes down the road out of breath. Annie is out of sight.

"I am come after my daughter, Mr. Bertram, if you please. Soon as I told her ye was here I was that mad with myself, for it flashed across me she'd come and——"

"And why not, madam?" says Fanshawe. "It is, it seems, all *en tout bien, tout honneur*."

"I don't understand gibberish, sir, but girls should be circumspec."

Fanshawe gazes at her through his eyeglass.

"Your mother-in-law to be?" he murmurs.

Mrs. Brown, not hearing, goes on in a rather shrill tone: "I don't mean my daughter to walk along with you, sir, till she's a right to

An Altruist

take your arm afore everybody."

Bertram shudders.

Fanshawe lifts his hat to Mrs. Brown approvingly.

"These sentiments, madam, do you the highest honour. The quality, as you would call them, are not so severe. Their young ladies sit out on the staircases, and flirt in corners with their young men, and meet them in these sylvan groves with a groom as chaperon, without any certainty that matrimony will ever follow. But then the *demi-vierge* is probably confined to the Upper Ten."

"I don't know about the ways o' the gentry, sir," says Mrs. Brown; "in our street we're respectable though we *are* back o' Portman Square."

"Madam! Juvenal himself

§ An Altruist

never implied anything so crushing ! Bertram, I ask again, is this good lady about to be your mother-in-law ? ”

“ Don’t be a fool. ”

“ Well, dear madam, it is but right that, standing in this future relation to my friend, you should know this fact : Mr. Bertram has had a very large property left him. ”

“ Lawk a mussy, sir ! ”

“ But he is inclined to refuse it on account of his social principles, with which, no doubt, you are acquainted. Now, dear madam, tell us freely your opinion as a person of sound common sense, and one who is about to be closely allied to him. Should he refuse it, or should he accept it ? ”

“ Dearie, dearie, sir ! How can anybody hev left good money to such a gawk ! ”

An Altruist 50

Fanshawe laughs aloud :
“ When Truth comes out of
her well she is seldom polite !
Never mind, Mrs. Brown, you
can make your peace with your
son-in-law some other time.
Only tell us now, for we are
going to the lawyers on this
momentous errand. Ought he
to accept or to refuse ? ”

Annie's mother is flattered at
the deference to her opinion.

“ Well, sir, it ain't for the
like o' me to judge for the likes
o' you. But, if ye want my
plain opinion, it is this 'un : if
he take the proputtty he'll *look*
silly. But if he don't take it
he'll *be* silly ; and he'll be sorry
all his life.”

“ Mrs. Brown,” says Ber-
tram, “ your daughter would
not say so.”

“ Likely not, sir. She's a
slim snippet of a girl as haven't

§ An Altruist

felt any o' the weight o' livin' yet. When she hev she'll know a full money-box is the softest pillar one can lay a tired head on any night."

"Mrs. Brown, the classic form of Socrates dwindle before yours ! I place you immediately upon the staff of the *Torch*."

Mrs. Brown is puzzled. "I don't hold with torches, sir. Sam's link-boy, last week in the great fog, flourishing one about like a fool, set fire to all the straw—such a piece o' work—and Sam warn't hinsured."

"I wince under the moral lesson which you convey by your apologue to my journal, but——"

"How much longer are you going to waste in chaffing this woman?" says Bertram, very angrily. "There's an empty hansom passing. Take it."

An Altruist 86

“Take it yourself. Mrs. Brown, your lips drop pearls of wisdom. Yet you are servile, Mrs. Brown. Are we not all equal before the great Bona Dea of Nature?”

“Equal, sir?” repeats Mrs. Brown, with fine scorn. “That’s *his* rot; yet when he come to our place one day, and we was eatin’ good Dutch cheese and ’errings, he well-nigh fainted at the stink on ’em!”

Fanshawe laughs delightedly.

“He live on peaches and pinehapples, he do,” she continued, with a snort; “and he’s spoilt a good seasonable chance o’ settlin’ herself as my daughter had with the young man round the corner——”

“Shut up that jaw, Fanshawe!” cries Bertram, falling into low language in his wrath.

“Will you go to Folliott

§ An Altruist

and Hake's or not?" asks his friend.

"I will go to Satan's self to stop you chaffing this woman. Look how those people are laughing."

Bertram calls the passing hansom and gets into it ; Fanshawe follows him, and waves his hand to Mrs. Brown.

"You must come and dine with me at Richmond, Mrs. Socrates !"

Cicely and her cousin are sitting under a tree near the end of the Ladies' Mile with some men standing before them and talking to them, when Marlow again approaches, diffident, but in ill-concealed triumph.

"Oh, Lady Jane," he says eagerly, not venturing to address Cicely directly, "I've come back 'cos I've such a bit of news ; am authorised to tell it ;

An Altruist §

may put it in the *Morning Post* to-morrow. I've seen 'the penny bunch of violets,' and by all that's awful, she's a washerwoman's daughter, and Bertram's going to marry her. It's Annieism you see, not Altruism."

Much pleased with his own wit and humour he laughs gleefully, whilst his eyes are trying to read Cicely's face ; it gives no sign of any feeling or of having even heard what he has said.

"What nonsense you talk, Lord Marlow !" says Lady Jane. "Bertram may be silly, but he is not so utterly out of his mind as that."

"Isn't he? Why, he's just told me the news himself ! The young woman was with him down yonder. She sells flowers, and had got two skips

98 An Altruist

full of primroses ; and she's not a good feature in her face. I'll offer to be best man ; shall I send 'em a set of saucepans or a sewing-machine ? ”

Cicely casts a look of supreme contempt upon him.

“ The perfection to which you bring your jokes must have cost you a long apprenticeship on Bank Holidays, Lord Marlow.”

Marlow's mirth is a little subdued.

“ You can't be speaking seriously,” says one of the men present. “ Bertram is not quite such an ass as that.”

“ I am, though,” replies Marlow, sulkily. “ I've seen the girl, and Bertram's just told me to tell everybody.”

“ What is her name ? ”

“ She's Annie Brown ; we heard that yesterday. Mother

An Altruist 80

takes in washing. Oh, Lord, it'll kill me, the fun of it."

Doubled up with silent laughter he leans upon his cane and furtively watches Cicely's face.

"Why should you be surprised that Mr. Bertram puts his theories into practice?" she says, coldly. "It is only like Count Tolstoi's ploughing."

"Goodness, Cicely!" says Lady Jane, with much irritation. "You surely can't defend such an insanity as this? It is very much worse than any plough. I thought his manner very odd yesterday about those violets; for he is not, you know, a man *à bonnes fortunes*."

"You would approve him more if he were!"

"Well, they are less serious," answers Lady Jane. "You can

§ An Altruist

get rid of *them* ; but an Annie Brown when you have once married her——”

“ At all events,” says Cicely, “ whatever it may be, it is certainly only the business of those concerned in it, and none of ours. Why are you not already on your way to the newspaper offices, Lord Marlow ? I believe they give a guinea for first news.”

“ Bertram may be so happy as to interest you, Miss Seymour,” says Marlow, sullenly, “ but he’s an unknown quantity to the world in general. Nobody’d give twopence for any news of him.”

“ Certainly he is not chronicled as the winner at pigeon-shooting and polo matches, which is your distinction, Lord Marlow, and I believe your only one.”

An Altruist 80

“Why will you be so unkind to Marlow?” asks Lady Jane, as, having shaken off their admirers, they walk back alone.

“I grant,” she continues, as poor Marlow, mortified, falls behind, “that he is not an extraordinarily brilliant person ; he will not head the Cabinet or be President of the Royal Society, but his temper is kind and his character blameless.”

“One would think you were recommending a groom ! You may safely add that his hand is light and his seat is sure, for riding is his solitary accomplishment !”

“My dear child, how remarkably severe you are ! Will you tell me what use to Wilfrid Bertram are the incontestable talents with which he was born ? What does he do with them ? Write in such a

manner that if he were a native of any other country than England he would have been lodged in prison years ago."

Cicely Seymour is silent.

She has read some numbers of the *Age to Come*, and she cannot honestly say that she approves of its subversive tendencies. She looks straight before her with a heightened colour, and the rose-leaves of her lips are pressed together in irritation.

"I suppose you will offer to be bridesmaid to Miss Annie Brown," says Lady Jane, irritably.

"Why not?" says Cicely, very coldly. "One attends many weddings brought about by more ignoble motives."

"You will not see me at the ceremony," replies Lady Jane, more and more incensed.

An Altruist §

“I know I shall not, nor any of his relatives. But I do not admire the class prejudice which will keep you all away.”

And she leans over the rail of the Ride and pats the mane of a child's pony.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Brown, resting her empty basket and her rheumatic limbs for a few minutes on a bench, ponders vainly on the name Mr. Fanshawe gave her. “Mrs Sockatees,” she repeats to herself. “He can't think as I'm one to marry agen at my time o' life. If it hadn't bin for the children there were a tallow chandler, a warm man too, he was, who would hev bin ready as ready——”

She muses pensively a moment on the charms of the lost tallow chandler who had been sacrificed to her maternal

§ An Altruist

scruples, whilst Cicely Seymour and Lady Jane are walking towards her.

“Let’s sit down here a moment, Cicely,” says Lady Jane. “The children will be back again directly.”

Mrs. Brown rises and curtsies, taking up her basket.

“Don’t get up, my good woman, there’s room enough.”

“Your ’umble servant, ma’am,” says Mrs. Brown, standing erect, her empty basket held before her like a shield of Boadicea; she does not know them by name, but they are possible clients for the wash-tub.

“Why should you stand?” says Cicely. “These seats are free to all.”

“Thanks, miss, but I know my duty.” Then she adds, insinuatingly, “If you should be

An Altruist 56

wanting a laundress, ma'am, you'd be doin' a charity to remember me—Eliza Brown, o' 20, Little Double Street, back o' Portman Square; no acids used, miss, and no machine-work."

Cicely looks at her, and with some hesitation asks :

"Are you — are you — the mother of a young person called Annie Brown? She has just gone past here with some prim-roses."

"Yes, miss, I be."

"Of Mr. Bertram's heroine!" adds Lady Jane, with a laugh.

"Please 'm, don't call her names, ma'am," says Annie's mother, quickly. "She's a good girl, though I say it as shouldn't say it, and there's nought to laugh at, unless it be the gentleman's rubbish."

"You don't seem to be grate-

§ An Altruist

ful for the compliment he pays to your family," says Lady Jane, much amused.

"Compliment is it, my lady? The gentleman's a crank, that's what he is; he won't never marry her, and there's a good young man round the corner as is left out in the cold. He's in the greengrocery line, and hev got a good bit o' money put by, and the match 'ud be suitable in every way, for my daughter's a good judge o' green stuff."

"Mrs. Brown," says Cicely, "I should like to have the pleasure of knowing your daughter. Will you bring her to see me? I am staying with Mr. Bertram's aunt, Lady Southwold."

Mrs. Brown stares hard.

"You do my girl a great honour, miss, but her head's turned too crazy as 'tis. Poor

An Altruist 50

folks, miss, ain't got no place with rich 'uns."

"That is a rather narrow feeling, Mrs. Brown," says Cicely; "and surely your daughter ought to begin to know Mr. Bertram's friends and relatives?"

"She won't never be nought to Mr. Bertram, miss," replies Mrs. Brown, very confidently. "'Tis a pack of stuff their thinkin' on it. Lord, my lady, if you only see his shirts, that fine as cobwebs is coarse to 'em!"

Lady Jane is much diverted.

"She evidently does not believe in the seriousness of Bertram's intentions, Cicely."

Mrs. Brown tucks her basket under her arm.

"You'll excuse me, my ladies, if I don't stay to prate. Us poor folks 'even't got time

§ An Altruist

to lose in gossip ; and if you can give me work, 'm, I'll be truly thankful to you, ma'am—Eliza Brown, 20, Little Double Street, back o' Portman Square. Your servant, ladies."

With that she bobs a curtsy and departs.

"A nice honest woman," says Cicely.

Lady Jane laughs.

"She doesn't appreciate Bertram or his shirts. What right has he, with his principles, to wear lawn shirts? He ought to wear hemp."

Cicely traces patterns on the gravel with her sunshade.

"I should like to see the girl."

"Why? You may be sure she is a little horror."

"I am sure she is a very good girl," says Cicely. "I am sure she is a very good girl."

An Altruist 56

A person must be good that lives amongst flowers."

"Florists are not all saints," replies Lady Jane, out of patience; "and it does not seem an exalted mission to make button-holes for mashers. There is not even the excuse of good looks for Bertram's aberration. She is quite a plain little thing, Marlow says."

"Let us take another turn," says Cicely. "We shall see the children again."

Bertram returns from his visit to Folliott and Hake at two o'clock that day. He intended going down into the country to a friend's house—a friend who buys Whistlers, adores Mallarmé and Verlaine, writes studies on the *pointillistes*, and has published a volume of five hundred pages on Strindberg—but he feels indisposed for even

§ An Altruist

that sympathetic society. He sends a telegram to excuse himself, and opens his own door with his latch-key.

His rooms are *en suite*, one out of another, and from the door-mat he can see through all four of them, between the curtains of Eastern stuffs which he had brought home years before from Tiflis. He cannot believe in the sight which meets his eyes in the third room, which is his study.

There is in that room a large Florentine cabinet of tortoise-shell and brass-work ; the key of the drawers thereof is on his watch-chain ; yet he perceives that the drawers are all open, their contents are strewn about, and stooping down over them is Critchett.

Critchett's back is unmistakable ; it has as much character

An Altruist 50

in it as the profile of Cæsar or Napoleon.

Bertram walks noiselessly over the thick carpets, and touches him on the shoulder.

“You!—a common thief!”

Critchett stumbles to his feet, pulls himself erect rather nervously, and faces his employer. In his right hand is a pearl necklace.

“I beg pardon, sir,” he murmurs. “I thought you had gone to Mr. Domville’s. I was coming down with the valise.”

Bertram takes the pearls out of his grasp; he has grown much paler than his nefarious valet. He is cut to the heart.

“A common thief—you!” he repeats. The *Et tu Brute* had not more pathetic reproof in it.

Critchett in the interval has

recovered his self-possession, and what more vulgar persons would call his cheek.

“Excuse me, sir. There aren’t such a thing as theft. What is called theft is only an over-violent readjustment of unfairly divided values. I’ve read it in the *Age to Come*.”

“You infernal scoundrel! These are my dead mother’s jewels!”

“I know they are, sir. They were doing no good here; and you told the ladies yesterday as all jewellery was an abomination.”

“This is probably not the first time by many that you have robbed me?”

“I let nobody else steal a farthing from you, sir.”

“Indeed! You like vicarious virtue! How could you open the cabinet? It has a Bramah lock.”

“And this here’s a Bramah pick-lock, sir,” says Critchett, displaying an elegant little tool.

“You infernal scoundrel !” repeats Bertram. “If I did my duty, I should give you to the police.”

“Oh, no, sir, you couldn’t do that to be consistent ; and consistency is the first of virtues. I’ve heard you say, sir, that prevention is suggestion, and that if there was no constables there’d be no crime. In locking up this cabinet you put into my mind the idea of opening it. It is you, sir, who are to blame, not I.”

Critchett smiles demurely as he repeats these words.

“You have debased me, sir, by making me fill a servile office,” he adds. “No man should serve another. You’ve said so often.”

§ An Altruist

Bertram is silent, unspeakably annoyed, mortified, and distressed. He cannot discuss ethics with a treacherous valet.

"I believed in you, Critchett," he says, after a pause.

Critchett smiles.

"I know you did, sir; you believe in a lot o' things as won't wash."

"And you feel no remorse for having deceived me?"

"No, sir. Remorse aren't seen outside the theatres, I think. 'Tis a word, sir. 'Tis only a word."

Bertram is silent. The cheap cynicism of this man, who has lived beside him during a dozen years, is revolting.

"You are aware I could have you arrested?" he says, after a pause.

"No, sir, you couldn't," replies Critchett, calmly. "You'd

An Altruist 56

be giving the lie to all your own theories. Try and look at it philosophic-like, sir."

Bertram feels a violent longing to call up the policeman now passing by the rails of the Green Park. He puts a five-pound note on the table.

"Take your wage for the coming month, and begone."

"It is usual, sir," objects Critchett, "to give more than a month's anticipatory honorarium on parting after such long association."

This is the drop too much which makes the cup of Bertram's patience overflow.

"You impudent villain," he exclaims. "The only payment you deserve is the treadmill. Do not stretch my patience too far."

Critchett perceives that his long docile victim is roused, and may become dangerous.

§ An Altruist

He retreats meekly.

"Would you wish to examine my portmanteau, sir?"

"No," says Bertram. "Be-gone."

Critchett bows very low.

"I have only put your theories into practice, sir," he says, when he has reached a safe distance ; "and you will be sorry if you send me away. You won't find another Critchett very easily."

Bertram turns his back on him ; he feels again a great inclination to summon the constable who is walking in the street below.

The man having at last departed, he picks up the various objects and begins to replace them in the drawers of the cabinet. He is depressed and humiliated. For over twelve years he has implicitly trusted Critchett, believed in him, ex-

An Altruist §

tolled him, and depended on him ; taking his excellent service as a surety for moral excellence, as most of us do with our servants.

The cool impertinence with which the thief has quoted his own writings and sayings against him mortifies him ; he is conscious that Critchett must have always considered him an ineffable idiot. It is not soothing to one's self-respect to realise that for more than a dozen years one has been made a fool of successfully.

The sight of his mother's jewels also saddens him ; he had been her favourite son, and he had loved her tenderly.

" You will keep them for your wife, Wilfrid," she had said to him, when she had given him the pearls and other ornaments on her death-bed.

❧ An Altruist

What would his mother say, were she living, to such a wife for him as poor little Annie Brown? Poor Annie! Who said "as how" and "umberellar," and who "liked to 'ear the growlers come rattlin' 'ome o' nights."

"Mr. Bertram," says the voice of Annie at that moment timidly. She has come through the anteroom of which Critchett has left the door open behind him. She wears the same clothes that she wore in the Park, but she carries no baskets on her arms.

Noticing Bertram's preoccupied and distressed expression and the litter of objects on the floor, she is afraid she appears at an inopportune moment.

"Lord's sakes, sir!" she murmurs, "what hev happened?"

"Critchett is a thief, Annie.

An Altruist

I caught him in the act," replies Bertram, with tragic force.

"Mother always knew as he was so, sir," replies the girl, not astonished. "But she didn't dare to tell you. You was that fond on him."

"How could she possibly know?"

"Well, sir, he was allers a-boasting of 'ow he fleeced you. I believe all the gentlemen's gentlemen in these 'ere parts o' London know how he tricked ye. Law, sir, he even pawned your shirts!"

"Why didn't you warn me?"

"Well, you see, sir, we didn't like to lose a man his place."

"You condoned a felony sooner?"

"Please, sir, I don't know what that is. But poor folk don't never take the bread out

❧ An Altruist

of each other's mouths. And, besides, you wouldn't have believed anybody against Critchett, sir. You were that wrapped up in him."

"How cruelly one may be deceived !"

"'Tis easy to deceive you, sir, as instead of seeing people as they is, you see 'em as you fancies 'em to be."

"Perhaps so. I fear I am a greater fool than I thought."

"Oh, no, sir ; only too trustin' like."

"Well, well," says Bertram, much irritated, " Critchett is a thing of the past. We will never speak of him. But why have you come to my rooms, my dear girl ? It is not—not quite—correct. Cæsar's wife you know. But perhaps you never heard of her——"

"No, sir. Who was the

An Altruist 56

lady? I only came to say a word, Mr. Bertram. There aren't no harm in it, though mother would be angry over the place."

"If you had sent me a line I would have called on you."

"You see, sir, mother's and sister Kate's at home, they'd hear every word, and I want to speak to you all alone. I won't be many minutes. I don't think it's any harm my comin', though mother would be fit to kill me if she knew——"

"Your mother is quite right in her views, Annie. Young women cannot be too circumspect."

"I'm allus circumspec', sir ; and—oh, Lord, Mr. Bertram, what a beautiful string o' pearls !"

"They were my mother's, Annie. They will be yours."

An Altruist

“Mine, sir ! Lord, never ! The idea of Critchett takin’ them pearls. Why they must be worth thousands and thousands ! ”

“No, a few hundreds. My mother left these things to me for my wife when I should have one. They are very sacred to me. They will be as dear to you, Annie, I am sure ? ”

“Oh, sir, they’ll never be mine. You might as well talk of my wearin’ the crown of England.”

“Always low and servile comparisons, Annie ! ”

“Lord, sir, be a queen’s crown low ? ”

“To think of it as a desirable and enviable thing is extremely low.”

“I’m afraid, sir, I don’t understand. Will you please put up these pearls ? They’re

An Altruist 56

that beautiful I don't dare touch 'em."

"They will be my wife's. Therefore I repeat they will be yours."

"That's what I come to say to you, sir. What we have thought of won't never be. Can't never be. Tisn't in reason. When the 'bus run over me in Piccadilly last year, and you picked me up and took me 'ome, you seemed like a prince to me, sir——"

"Always vulgar and servile comparisons !"

"And when you come about our place, mother said to me, 'That gent don't mean no good, and it's the broom I'll take to him ' ; and Sam he said, 'If he's harter Hann I'll give 'im a 'idin'.' And then you said we was to marry, and mother said it was all moon-

¶ An Altruist

shine, and Sam didn't like the idea of it ; but you said it would be a beautiful example to all classes, and I—I—well I couldn't believe my ears, Mr. Bertram."

"What is the use of going over all this ground, Annie?"

"I want you to understand, sir. I've been thinkin' and thinkin' of all you said yesterday, and I see, sir, as how you haven't a mite o' love for me, and it makes me feel cold all over like——"

"Oh, why do you want love? It is something so vulgar, so unspiritual, so indicative of an unoccupied mind ! I have the highest respect for you, which I am about to prove in the strongest manner that any man can prove his sentiments——"

"Yes, I know, sir ; but—but——"

An Altruist 36

“But there are finer sentiments than love ! ”

“Perhaps there are, sir, for the quality. But love’s poor people’s feast ; the only one they ever knows all their days. And—you—don’t love me ? ”

She looks at him fixedly.

He is embarrassed.

“Should I have given you my mother’s pearls if I did not ? ”

“You haven’t giv’ ’em, and I haven’t took ’em. Some other than me ’ll wear ’em. I came to say to you, Mr. Bertram, that I won’t never marry you. Mother says as ’ow you’ve come into a great fortune ; but, whether you’re rich or poor, that’s nothing to me. I won’t marry you, ’cos we’d be miserable ; and that’s what I come here all alone to-day to say to you.”

❧ An Altruist

“ You are faithless, Annie ! ”

“ No, sir ; I’m faithful. As for me, I’ll remember ye all my days. P’rhaps I’ll marry, p’rhaps I won’t ; but I’ll never forget *you*, and I’ll pray for you every night.”

Bertram is touched and astonished.

“ But, my dear little girl, you have my word of honour. I can’t retract it. I will try and make you happy, Annie.”

“ I’m sure you would try, sir ; but you couldn’t do it. You’d make me miserable. You haven’t any love for me ; you have said you hadn’t. I couldn’t live like that. I’d work on my knees for you all the day long, but I couldn’t stand your chilly pity and your smiling scorn. I’d die of shame and sorrow ! ”

“ My poor child, you exag-

An Altruist §

gerate immensely. You don't understand what sincere regard I have for you, how honestly I will try to do my duty by you."

"Sir, I ain't more fit for you than my poor sun-browned throat be fit for a lady's jewels. You've had a hobby, and you've rid it hard, and I was a part of it for awhile. But 'twas only a fancy. Lord ! how clear I saw it all when you spoke so scornful-like o' love ! Love may be a ordinary valleyless sort o' thing like buttercups and daisies, but how them little blossoms do make a glory on a dusty common ! It's the buttercups and daisies as I want, sir ; not them cold, white pearls."

"Poor little Annie ! I can't give you what I have not."

"No, sir, that's just it ; the fault ain't none o' yours. Don't

❧ An Altruist

think as I blame ye, sir, or cast a word against ye. We are as we are made. But it is good-bye, sir, and goodbye it must be for ever. Don't ye worry or fret. 'Taint no fault o' yours. We're too wide apart, and 'twas folly to think as we could ever be one."

Her voice breaks down, her tears fall ; Bertram takes her hands in his and kisses her on the forehead.

"Dear little Annie ! I feel as if I had sinned against you ! and yet God knows I had the best intentions ; and if I deceived any one, I deceived myself first of all."

The tramp of heavy steps is heard in the rooms beyond, and Annie's elder brother, Sam, dashes the door-curtains aside and enters, wildly flourishing a driving-whip.

An Altruist 50

“Yah ! Bloated aristocrat ! I’ve nabbed ye at last ! Shame on ye ! Shame on ye, too, Hann !” he yells at the top of his voice. “Out o’ this room, gal, whilst I gi’e your bloomin’ nob the lickin’ he deserves. ’Tis for this we pore workin’-folk toils and moils and starves, to hev our wimmen-kind trod under foot like dirt by black-guard swells ! Sister Kate, at ’ome, says to me, ‘Sam, run quick and ye’ll catch ’em together.’ And I meets yer servant in the street, and he says, too, ‘Run, Sam, and ye’ll catch ’em together.’ But I never thought, respectable as our fam’ly is, and so mealy-mouthed as is Sister Hann——”

Bertram coldly interposes.

“When you have done yelling, my good youth, will you listen to a word of common sense ?”

❧ An Altruist

“Oh, Sam, are you mad?” cries Annie. “Kate never meant anything of the kind. You know Mr. Bertram has ever treated me as if I was a waxworks under a glass case.”

“Take off your hat, put down your whip, apologise to your sister, and listen to me,” says Bertram, with authority.

But the youth is in no mood to hear or to obey. He has taken a glass of gin with a fellow-cabby, and his blood is on fire.”

“I won’t listen to you, nor to nobody. Ye’ll get yer thrashin’ at last, you scoundrel, as preaches to the pore.”

He advances on Bertram, whirling his horsewhip, with a broken lash, above his head. Bertram eyes him calmly, remembers old Oxford rows, straightens his arm, and meets

An Altruist 50

him with a scientific blow which sends him backward on the floor.

“Don’t scream, Annie. I have not hurt your brother ; but he must have a lesson,” he says, as he picked up the whip which has dropped, breaks it, in two, and throws the pieces in a corner. “Get up, you dolt, and ask your sister’s pardon,” he adds, severely, “for brawling in her presence.”

Sam Brown does get up, stupidly and slowly, looks around him bewildered, with a dazed, blind look.

“You hits uncommon hard,” he mutters, when he becomes fully alive to the position which he occupies.

“Certainly, I hit hard when I hit at all. You insulted me and, more gravely still, your sister. I am perfectly ready to marry her ; but she will not

§ An Altruist

marry me. Can you put that into your brain and understand it?"

Sam stares and rubs his aching head.

"Lord, sir, do you mean as Hann hev jilted you?"

"Oh, Sam, how can you!" cries his sister.

"I believe that is what you would call it in your world," says Bertram, with a slight smile. "Your sister does not wish to marry me. She thinks — perhaps she is right — that I am not worthy of her."

"Oh, Mr. Bertram! I never——"

"She is my dear little friend, Sam," continues Bertram; "she will always be my friend; and if you presume to slight or worry her in any kind of way, you will have to deal with me. You know now how I treat affronts."

An Altruist 56

The youth is still stupid and ruefully rubbing his pate.

“Lawk a mussy ! If you would be spliced to her, she is a darned fool.”

“She is a little sage and a little saint. See her safe home, and there are two sovereigns to buy a new whip.”

“Oh, don’t take the money, Sam !” cries Annie.

But Sam pockets the sovereigns.

“Strikes me, mister, you owes me more than that,” he mutters. “’Tis assault and battery.”

“I shall give you no more money,” says Bertram, very decidedly. “I will knock you down again if you like.”

“Come away, Sam,” says Annie, pulling him towards the door. “Oh Sam, aren’t you ashamed ?”

An Altruist

“Naw, I ain’t,” says her brother. “Kate said, ‘Run and you’ll find ’em together.’ I run and I did find ye together. How was I to know?”

“Oh, come away, Sam,” repeats his sister, in anguish. “Come away. You disgrace yourself and me. I’ll tell mother.”

Sam is suddenly subdued and greatly alarmed.

“Naw, don’t tell mother,” he mutters, and suffers himself to be led away.

“Oh, I am so ashamed! so ashamed, Mr. Bertram!” says Annie. “Do pray forgive him. He is only a lad.”

“I would forgive him much heavier offences. He is your brother.”

“God bless you, sir,” she says, softly, looking back at him as she goes out of the door.

An Altruist §

“Dear little girl ! Dear, honest little girl !” murmurs Bertram. “I will try and get her the kitchen, and the muffin, and the cat, which form her ideal, and some good fellow to sit with her by the hearth. Good Heavens ! Can one ever be grateful enough for being saved from relationship to Sam ? What an exciting and exhausting day ! And I have been very Philistine !”

He looks wearily round the room ; it has become shockingly disordered ; the drawers of the cabinet are still on the floor ; the chairs which fell are still upside down ; the broken whip lies in the corner ; he is extremely thirsty, and he has not an idea where the mineral waters or the syphon of seltzer, or even the glasses, are kept. In a single quarter of an hour

❧ An Altruist

without Critchett order and harmony have been replaced by chaos.

“What miserable, helpless creatures we are!” he reflects. “Of course it all comes from the utterly false system of one person leaning on others.”

Yet he reluctantly realises that this false system has its merits, as far as individual comfort goes.

At that moment there is a sharp ring at the door-bell, and a moment later still a male voice cries :

“Can I come in, Bertram?”

“You, Stanhope?” says Bertram, in extreme surprise.

“Myself,” replies the new-comer.

He is Sir Henry Stanhope, the Home Secretary of the actual Government. Bertram was his fag at Eton, and a good deal of cordial feeling

An Altruist 86

has always existed between them, despite the vast and irreconcilable difference of their political and social opinions. Sir Henry regards him as a maniac, but an interesting and lovable maniac. Bertram regards him in return as a hopeless Philistine, but a Philistine who means well and has good points, and who is, in the exercise of his horrible office, admirably conscientious. His conscientiousness has not, however, prevented him from allowing to go to the gallows a victim of prejudice who killed his wife because he was tired of seeing her red hair — a misguided æsthete for whose release Bertram pleaded in vain. Since the time of this unfortunate affair there has been some chillness in the relations of Stanhope and himself.

❧ An Altruist

The Philistine minister looks at the disorder of the chamber with some surprise, and seats himself unbidden.

“My dear Bertram,” he says, rather distantly, “old acquaintance should not be forgot. Its memories bring me here to-day.”

“Thanks,” says Bertram, equally coldly; and looks an interrogation.

Sir Henry coughs.

“You have a good many *protégés* amongst the lower classes, I think?”

“I deny that there is a lower class.”

“I know you do. But let us for the moment use the language of a benighted and unkind world. Your peculiar views of duty have led you into forming these associations which cannot be agreeable to

An Altruist 36

your taste. But did it not occur to you that they might be compromising as well as—as rather unrefined?”

“Pray explain yourself,” says Bertram, with hostility in his tone.

Sir Henry feels nettled at the manner in which his amiably intended visit is received.

“Certainly,” he says. “In two words, you have a friend of the name of Hopper?”

Bertram colours.

“Frederic Hopper, yes. A very unfortunate person, originally a victim of the London police.”

“Possibly. The police are always accused of being oppressors or accomplices,” continues the minister. “This person is known to them as ‘Wet Whistle,’ because he has exaggerated views of the

❧ An Altruist

medicinal value of stimulants. This victim came again in collision with the brute force of the police early this morning, and you were present."

Bertram is silent, conscious that the episode is not heroic.

"Mr. Frederic Hopper does not interest me in the least," says Stanhope, with culpable heartlessness; "but it seems you used very singular language to the constables in the Park; and when the man was brought before the Westminster police-court he gave your name as that of the person who had indoctrinated him with subversive views, and it seems that you admitted having done so to the constables in Hyde Park, and stated that you deserved arrest more than did this man Hopper. The police, of course, reported all that you

An Altruist 86

said at headquarters ; and you are likely to be very seriously annoyed about this matter. It is very dangerous to play at anarchism in these days——”

“If any one is to blame, it is I rather than Hopper ; but there is no question of anarchism.”

“I should certainly consider you the more to blame of the two. A magistrate would take the same view. The Chief Commissioner is of opinion that you ought to have been arrested with Hopper, since he places all the blame of the subversive principles which he had been delivering in public upon you.”

Bertram does not reply.

“He states that you had repeatedly wanted him to place explosives in public buildings, and that you had promised him

❧ An Altruist

the run of the cellars of Buckingham Palace, if he would throw a hand grenade into the royal carriage as the Queen drives from Paddington Station next Monday."

Bertram smiles faintly.

"Are you sure that these vivid romances are not composed in Scotland Yard?"

Sir Henry is thoroughly annoyed.

"No, sir. Scotland Yard has too many real tragedies to deal with to have time or patience to compose mock melodramas. The man Hopper said this, and much more, inculcating you as an anarchist. All this might have passed as a drunken ranter's ravings, but unfortunately there were your published opinions in that organ of yours, the *Age to Come*. The magistrate, Mr.

An Altruist 80

Adeane, being acquainted with these, thought the matter serious enough to communicate with me, whilst he committed the fellow for seven days. Mr. Adeane was justly of opinion that if you will incite persons to violent and nefarious acts, your social rank and intellectual culture ought not to save you from punishment."

"Certainly they ought not."

"Then you do not admit holding such opinions?"

"No ; I am altogether opposed to force ; to force of any kind."

"Then your *protégé* lied?"

"If he used such expressions, yes."

"If ! Do you suppose a magistrate would send a deposition which was never made to the Home Office ? I repeat that what gave weight and

¶ An Altruist

credence to this wretched agitator's accusations of you were the very—very—advanced opinions acknowledged and disseminated by you in the *Age to Come*. Re-read for yourself these passages,” continues Stanhope, taking out his note-book. “Page iv. par. vi. No. 52 ; page iii. par. xi. No. 23 ; page xix. par. ii. No. 9 ; page viii. par. xv. No. 45—what is the meaning of such phrases as these ? ‘The poor have always been robbed by capital since the creation of currency and the invention of trade. All excesses are to be excused to them in taking back their own.’ Or this : ‘The rich man, however estimable in private character, is in position a thief, and in conscience a scoundrel.’ Or this : ‘Poor-rates and workhouses are the insult which

An Altruist 56

is added to injury by the rich in their relations with the poor.' Or this : 'Nitric acid destroys more readily but not more cruelly than taxation.' "

"Do you consider these statements unjustified by the state of society?" asks Bertram.

"I consider them most dangerous when put before illiterate persons," replies Stanhope. "The half-truths, or the quarter-truths, which they contain, are as poisonous as *nux vomica*."

"Pray, then, let me go and pick oakum with the unfortunate man whom you consider I have contaminated."

Stanhope with difficulty keeps down his rising anger.

"My dear Bertram, I regret that you appreciate my intentions so little. I received the communication I speak of from Mr. Adeane concerning you ;

§ An Altruist

and if I had done what I ought I should perhaps have given you some trouble. But I know you ; and I know that it is an exaggerated altruism which runs away with you into dangerous places ; and that you are the last man in the world to inculcate or to approve of crime."

"But what *is* crime?" murmurs Bertram. "Have not regicides many apologists? Is Carlyle alone in admiring Cromwell? As boys are we not adorers of Harmodius and Aristogiton?"

"Fortunately," continues Sir Henry, waving aside these historical precedents, "the magistrate took a lenient view of the case, considered it excused by drink (we are always so immorally lenient to drink in this country!), and so I was enabled, by using unacknowledged influ-

An Altruist §6

ence (a thing I loathe to do), to get the affair hushed up. But I cannot prevent your being marked by the police and considered a dangerous person. You will probably be 'shadowed' for some time, and if anything of this sort occurs again it will be out of my power to save you from exceedingly disagreeable consequences."

Bertram is silent.

"Are you anxious to be a martyr in company with Hopper?" asks Stanhope, with impatience.

"If Hopper be made one, certainly."

Stanhope rises from his chair.

"I regret that I intervened to screen you from the consequences of your lubies. I stretched my prerogative, and risked the accusation of illegality in my functions, in order to

❧ An Altruist

extricate you from the dilemma in which your own imprudence placed you, and this I did in memory of old Eton days. But I assure you that I shall not interfere again, and I am sorry that you so little appreciate my friendship. Men in office, it is true, should have no personal feelings."

"I am of course grateful for your personal regard," replies Bertram, in icy tones, "but I cannot allow any one to criticise or control my opinions."

Sir Henry does not deign to reply. He takes his hat, and with a curt "good-day" goes out of the room.

"How impossible it is to live under a government which is utterly barbarian and unenlightened!" reflects Bertram; "and to think that Stanhope could become a member of it!"

An Altruist §

Such a fine scholar, such a devoted Hellenist, as he was at Eton ! And now sunk to a Home Secretary !—a keeper of the ban-dogs of the law ! It is so extraordinary that these Philistines never can comprehend the beauty of altruistic and collectivist views. They always confound them with anarchy ! As if any two creeds could possibly be more opposed. It is extremely disagreeable all the same. ‘Marked by the police !’ as if I had broken into a silversmith’s shop ! I wonder where Critchett kept the mineral waters ? I don’t know where anything is. If I had always served myself, how much better it would have been. It is so degrading this continual dependence upon others. Every kind of wrong-doing brings its own chastisement, and our

§ An Altruist

heresy and egotism in keeping others in servitude is visited on us by our own impotency to help ourselves in the simplest acts of daily life."

Some one taps at the door in the midst of his reflections.

"Come in!" he cried, irritably. "Will annoyances never cease?"

"It's me, sir," says Mrs. Brown. "Please as how I've come to bring you back these two sovereigns as you gave my son."

"Why? I gave them willingly."

"I can't hev him paid for his misbehaviour, sir, and he did misbehave hisself. Kate spoke in jest, and Sam, being tipsy, took it in earnest."

Bertram, fascinated by a social problem, answers dreamily: "Tell me, Mrs. Brown,

An Altruist

your son attended a Board School? ”

“ He did, sir.”

“ And he passed the fourth standard? ”

“ He did, sir.”

“ Then, my good woman, what benefit has that education been to him? ”

“ Lord, none, sir ; and nobbut fools could ever suppose as ’t would be any ! ” replies Mrs. Brown, briskly.

“ How very sad ! ” murmurs Bertram. “ But I have always feared that the whole system of modern education was one gigantic error. You cannot feed minds wholesale as you feed machines.”

“ ’Tis sad as poor folks should be made to pay for such gammon as them schools, sir,” says Mrs. Brown. “ I beg your pardon humbly for my

❧ An Altruist

boy's misconduct, and you'll please take back the money. As for the rest that Ann hev told me I'll make bold to say as I 'eartily agree with it. You know, Mr. Bertram, I never could 'old with that pack o' nonsense o' your marriage with my girl."

"I know you never approved, Mrs. Brown."

"No, sir, 'cause I knows my place. Lord, sir, ye'd hev been miserable and my poor girl too."

"Not through any fault of mine, Mrs. Brown."

"No, sir ; perhaps not. But miserable ye'd both hev bin. We'll allus remember ye kindly, sir, and I 'opes as ye'll still send us yer linen."

"Certainly, certainly. I shall always be your friend Pray take those sovereigns."

An Altruist 56

“No, sir ; let ’em lie. And might I be so bold as to ask hev ye took up your ’eritance, sir ? ”

“My cousin’s fortune ? No, I have refused it.”

“Lord, sir ! That’s a real right-down pity.”

“I do not see it so, Mrs. Brown.”

“Well, sir, a gent as wears such shirts as you shouldn’t quarrel with his bread and butter——”

A postman at that moment comes through the antechamber into the room, and tenders a registered letter with the receipt book for signature.

“What am I to do ? ” asks Bertram, helplessly. “Critchett has always seen to things of this kind.”

“You’re to sign your name in the book, sir,” says Mrs.

❧ An Altruist

Brown. He signs ; and the postman retires.

“I’ll leave ye to read your letter, sir,” says Mrs. Brown ; “and if a poor woman may give ye a word of advice, take them cobwebs out of your brain, sir, and open your eyes and see the world as ’t is. That ere man as ye thought so much on was a raskill, as rotten as shell-fish o’ Saturday nights. Ye’ve too good a ’eart, Mr. Bertram, a deal too good a ’eart ; and if you make yourself honey flies will eat yer ; that’s true as gospel, sir.”

“Wilfrid ! Wilfrid !” shouts an excited voice in the ante-room, as a robust form and a ruddy face, the face and form of a country gentleman, are visible in the distance.

Mrs. Brown discreetly retires.

“My dear Wilfrid, is it pos

An Altruist 96

sibly true what I heard in the Marlborough this moment?" cries Southwold, out of breath. "Have you actually inherited the whole fortune of those Italian Erringtons, and have never said a syllable about it to your aunt and myself? It is really — really — most extraordinary conduct."

"I do not see that the matter concerns you," says Bertram, tranquilly.

"Not concern us?" repeats Southwold, considerably astonished. "Well, anything so very fortunate occurring in my wife's family must concern every member of it. I never knew this young man, nor his father. There was that unfortunate dissension between your people and his. But it is very consoling that the grave has now closed on all past feud; and

❧ An Altruist

that the poor fellow did not allow his father's animosity to alienate him from his kith and kin. I really cannot congratulate you sufficiently."

"There is nothing to congratulate me upon," replies Bertram, impatiently.

"What?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Why?"

"Because I decline the bequest."

"Eh?"

"I decline the bequest."

Lord Southwold pants like a blown horse, his small blue eyes grow large and black; his ruddy face deepens to purple. "Good God! You are mad as a hatter!"

"Are hatters less sane than the rest of society? I am incredulous of the possibility."

"You can't mean what you say—you are joking!"

An Altruist §

“I am entirely serious. And, if you will allow me to say so, you must be aware that the matter does not, I repeat, in the most remote manner concern you.”

“Good Lord! Am I not your aunt’s husband?”

“I have always heard so, and Burke vouches for it.”

Southwold emits a strangled sound that is an oath, a snarl, and a groan in one.

“You ought to be placed in a padded room, sir?” he says at length, when he recovers his voice.

“Oh, I am never violent!” says Bertram with a slight smile, as he glances at the pieces of the broken whip.

“Where do the money and estates go?” roars Southwold.

“To a very respectable destination—Magdalen College.”

“All of it?”

☞ An Altruist

“ All of it.”

“ Oh Lord !”

The unhappy gentleman, gasping for breath, drops down on a seat.

“ With this fortune you could marry Cicely Seymour ! The girl likes you—more fool she !”

Bertram changes colour.

“ You have no right to speak of that young lady : she is your guest.”

Southwold becomes furious.

“ You dare to lecture me ? You infernal ass ! who are only fit for a strait-waistcoat.”

Bertram shrugs his shoulders.

“ You are stark staring mad !” roars Southwold ; “ and I tell you you are a disgrace to your family.”

Bertram smiles.

“ How extremely immoral, then, to wish me to accept and administer a great property.”

An Altruist

“ Damnation ! ”

Southwold puts his hat on his head, strikes his cane violently on the back of a chair, and rushes out of the room.

“ What can it possibly matter to him ? ” murmurs Bertram. “ The idea of money excites some people as valerian does cats.”

Lord Southwold, in a whirlwind of disgust, walks as rapidly as a gouty toe will let him through the three or four streets which divide him from his own house in Berkeley Square, and mounts the staircase of his home with his wrath at boiling-point. He goes into his wife’s morning-room, where she and Cicely Seymour are sitting, one reading, the other writing letters.

“ It’s true ! ” he shouts. “ It’s perfectly true ! it’s been left to

him and he won't have it—can you believe that? he won't have it!”

Cicely looks up from her book and says nothing; his wife looks up from her writing-pad and says with a sigh:

“I *can* believe it—*of him*.”

“Well, I can't; though I've heard him say it with my own ears,” returns her lord, as he drops down on a soft seat with the air of a man crushed, annihilated, effaced from creation.

“And he said, ‘What could it possibly matter to us?’” he added in a faint tone.

Cicely closes her book.

“Well, dear Lord Southwold, why should it matter?”

“Why?” he ejaculates.
“Why?”

“Why?” repeats his wife.
“Oh, Cicely!”

“Well, why?” she says, a

An Altruist §

little impatiently. "If Mr. Bertram likes to live a poor man instead of becoming a rich one, what business is it of anybody's?"

"Oh Lord!" sighs her host.

"Good heavens, Cicely!" cries his wife. "You might as well ask what does a man's suicide matter to his family?"

"Suicide is a disgrace, or at least it is esteemed so. This is an honour."

"An honour!" echo both her host and hostess in one breath.

"A very rare honour," she replies, "to have a relative who in these days has the courage and loyalty to principle to refuse a fortune."

Southwold is too utterly amazed and shocked to have any power to answer her.

"My dear girl, this is very

far-fetched," says his wife. "You are talking great nonsense, and approving great folly. I cannot believe that even my nephew Wilfrid will be capable of adhering to such a crazy and thankless decision."

"I am sure he will adhere to it," says Cicely Seymour, warmly. "At least if he do not I shall be very mistaken in him. Do you think," she adds with indignation, "that his principles are mere sugared beignets, mere frothy soufflés of eggs and cream?"

"His principles!" cries Southwold, with a snort like an angry horse. "Do you mean those preposterous tomfooleries with which he entertained us yesterday?"

"I mean the doctrines taught in his own journal. He is an

individualist, an altruist, a collectivist, a Mazzinist, a Tolstoi-ist. How could such a man with any consistency, with any decency, accept a great fortune ? ”

“ My dear Cicely,” said Lady Southwold, with unkind inciviveness. “ Only a great fortune could get such opinions forgiven to him ; and as he is going to marry a washer-woman’s daughter, if what you heard in the Park is true, he will certainly never get her into society on any income less than thirty thousand a year ! ”

“ He will not want to get her into society. Nobody gathers a dog-rose to put it under a forcing-frame.”

“ You are very epigrammatic, my dear, but I am afraid you have not much more common sense than Wilfrid Bertram.”

§ An Altruist

“John,” she adds to her husband, “do you think it would be of any use if I went and tried to persuade him to suspend his decision?”

“I don’t think it would be the slightest,” replies her lord. “But you might try. There would be no harm in trying. Tell him it’s flying in the face of Providence.”

“I am afraid he doesn’t believe in Providence!” says Lady Southwold, with a sigh.

Twenty minutes later she returns to her morning-room with a discouraged air, and draws off her gloves.

“He was not at home,” she says, in answer to her husband’s look of interrogation. “The door was shut, and his card was stuck under the bell with ‘Out’ written upon it. I suppose I could have done no good if

An Altruist 86

I had seen him. For I met Scott-Gwynne in the street, and he told me he had just heard Mr. Fanshawe saying in the reading-room at the Travelers' that Wilfrid had refused formally, and signed his refusal. Fanshawe was present."

"But Mr. Fanshawe as a Socialist, as a Radical, must approve the refusal?" says Cicely Seymour, from where she sits by a stand of Malmaison roses.

Southwold laughs grimly.

"Fanshawe thinks all wealth should be equally distributed; but so long as it isn't so, he gets all he can for himself, and considers everybody should do the same who has the opportunity."

Cicely is silent.

"I suppose Wilfrid has gone to have tea and shrimps with

• 98 An Altruist

the washerwoman," says Lady Southwold. "Cicely, give me some tea, please. I fear shrimps are an unknown joy to us."

Cicely rises and goes over to the tea-table.

"Are you really positive that he is going to marry this girl?" asks his aunt, as Cicely hands her a cup and some muffin.

"The mother of the girl said so," replies Cicely, coldly. "She did not, herself, seem to care about it."

Lord Southwold laughs savagely.

"To make a *mésalliance*, and not even to be welcome! By Jove! The fellow ought to be shot. Disgracing both our families in such a manner."

"You are unfair to him, Lord Southwold," says Cicely.

"In what way, my dear?"

"You do not attempt to

An Altruist §

enter into his views, his motives, his principles. His opinions may be somewhat exaggerated, but his loyalty to them is none the less admirable."

"Oh, you do admit they're exaggerated?"

"Some of them, yes. At least, in the *Age to Come* there are things which one cannot wholly accept, but they always err on the side of generosity! And he is always consistent. Mr. Fanshawe may be more politic, but he is far less to be respected. You blame the refusal of this fortune. But you must admit it shows his consistency."

"Only fools are consistent," says Southwold, with unspeakable contempt.

"Really," cries Lady Southwold, "one would think you were in love with Wilfrid to hear you, Cicely."

§ An Altruist

Cicely colours a little.

“One is not necessarily in love because one can see two sides to a question. It seems to me extremely unjust to quarrel with anybody for endeavouring loyally to carry out the views which they profess. You seem to admire Mr. Fanshawe’s opportunism : I do not.”

“Fanshawe is a shrewd man of the world, Wilfrid is a monomaniac who has gone daft on altruism.”

“Or Annie-ism, as Lord Marlow observed with such exquisite wit,” says Cicely from her retreat amongst the roses, whither she has returned after dispensing the tea.

A footman puts aside the *portières* of one of the doors, and announces :

“Mr. Bertram.”

An Altruist §

There is a dead silence.

Lord and Lady Southwold stare blankly at him.

Cicely rises from her bower of roses and crosses the room to him. She holds out her hand with a charming smile.

“Let me congratulate you on your marriage, Mr. Bertram,” she says, in a very kind, sweet voice.

Bertram looks at her with a little embarrassment.

“It is very good of you, Miss Seymour; you are the only person who has said a kind word——”

“A kind word! Can you expect kind words?” begins Southwold, in great ire.

“My dear Wilfrid, when you afflict and disgrace us so,” says his aunt.

Bertram silences them with an impatient movement.

§ An Altruist

“Allow me to speak. My marriage will not disgrace you, for it will not take place——”

“Thank God !” cries Lady Southwold.

“It is not I who have withdrawn. It is — it is — Miss Brown, with the consent of her family. But I did not come to speak of this matter, which is one purely personal ; one with which I was not aware you were acquainted. I came to apologise to Lord Southwold for my rudeness to him a little while ago.”

“All right, all right,” replies that choleraic but amiable person. “I’m afraid I used strong language myself ; but really your pig-headed illusions are so uncommonly trying to a plain, ordinary man like myself——”

“And you haven’t refused

the inheritance, Wilfrid ? ” asks his aunt, in great anxiety.

“ I have refused, certainly,” replies Bertram ; “ I have signed and sealed refusal.”

Southwold emits a very wicked word ; his wife groans aloud. Cicely Seymour, who has gone back to the roses, listens with a face grown bright with interest and approval.

“ Miss Seymour does not blame me ? ” says Bertram, softly.

“ No ; I should do as you have done.”

“ Thanks,” says Bertram, very gravely. Then he takes a registered letter out of his pocket.

“ I have just received this,” he continues. “ Will you allow me to read it to you ? It was sent to me by the poor vicar of a village in the Pontine

❧ An Altruist

marshes, near which my cousin met his death. He says that my cousin dictated it as he lay dying in his presbytery, and the priest wrote it ; it has been sent to me through the Embassy in Rome. Hence the delay. To Folliott of course the man of business had telegraphed. The letter which he dictated to this priest is, of course, in Italian. I propose to translate it to you, for I think my uncle and you do not know that language. It is very short."

He speaks to his aunt, but he looks at Cicely Seymour.

" 'I am a dead man,' " he reads aloud from the letter. " 'An old tusker has let life out of me for ever. You will get this when I am gone. I wish we had known each other. I have left you all

An Altruist

I possess, not because you are a relative, but because I think you will do good with it. I have not been a student, but I have seen some numbers of your journal, and though I do not agree with you in all your opinions, I see you care for the poor. Come and live on my lands, and you'll have work enough cut out for you. I have not done my duty—do yours.' It is signed by him, and the signature is witnessed."

They are all silent.

Lady Southwold has tears in her eyes.

"There is a postscript," continues Bertram, "'Take care of my horses and dogs.' The priest adds that the poor fellow had desired him to send it to the English Embassy, and died half an hour after dictating it. That is all."

❧ An Altruist

“It is very touching,” says his aunt. “I wish we had known him.”

“So do I.”

“A pity you did not get it earlier,” says Southwold, “or had not been so precipitate.”

Bertram folds the letter up and looks across at the Malmaison roses.

“Magdalen College,” adds Southwold, grimly, “won’t trouble itself much about the horses and dogs.”

“Can’t you withdraw your refusal, Wilfrid?” asks his aunt.

Bertram is silent.

“Would they let you?” asks Southwold.

“It is a cruel position to be placed in,” says Bertram.

“Would it be utterly impossible,” says Southwold, sarcastically, “for you to regard it, as

An Altruist §

a mere, humdrum, ordinary Philistine person like myself would do, as a very fortuitous and felicitous piece of good luck?"

"Good luck!" echoes Bertram, in disgust. "Cannot you see that whatever I do I must feel humiliation and remorse; that however I may decide, I must feel that I leave some duty undone?"

"No," says Southwold, very shortly, "I really cannot see anything of the sort. But I am obtuse, and I am very commonplace."

There is again a prolonged silence.

It is broken by the low, clear voice of Cicely Seymour, on whose hair the last rays of the dim red London sun are shining in a nimbus.

"I understand what Mr

Bertram feels. To accept this fortune will be painful, and even odious to him with his views. But to let it go to others, even to Oxford, must be, after receiving this letter, equally distressing to him because he will feel that he has failed to carry out a dead man's trust. Is not that your meaning, Mr. Bertram? "

"It is."

"These are very fine-drawn sentiments, and they are, I confess, wholly beyond me," says Southwold, with gruff contempt.

"I know what they both mean," says his wife. "But to me too it is, I admit, rather far-fetched. It seems to me so easy and so simple to go back to Folliott and Hake and say, 'I have changed my mind ; I accept.' "

An Altruist §

“But would it be right to do so?” says Bertram. “How can I be sure that the foul fiend of selfishness is not deluding me by taking the shape of duty?”

“You split straws!” growls Southwold. “The business of the world would never get done if men hemmed and hawed and tortured themselves as you do. *Can* you retract your refusal? That’s the main question.”

“I can. Folliott said that they should take no action on it for twenty-four hours, but hold it in abeyance for that term. Fanshawe suggested that, indeed insisted on it.”

“Fortunate for you that a practical man was with you. I have a respect for Mr Fanshawe which I did not feel before. Well, my dear Wilfrid, you can’t hesitate.”

Bertram does hesitate.

He looks across at the roses.

“Will you decide for me, Miss Seymour?”

“It is a great responsibility,” she replies, and her colour rises.

She plays with one of the roses nervously for a few moments. At last she looks up and says gravely :

“I think you should accept, Mr. Bertram. To you such wealth would be no sinecure, but always regarded as a great trust to be employed for the welfare of others.”

Bertram bends his head.

“Since you think so, I will endeavour to merit your opinion of me.”

“And if you go and live on the Italian lands you can be as self-sacrificing and as wretched as you like,” adds Southwold, gleefully. “Mosquitoes,

An Altruist §

malaria, malandrini, and the hourly probability of a shot from behind a hedge, or a dagger-thrust from an irate beggar, will certainly provide you with constant material for the most active altruism."

"Of course he will be in England half the time ; there is a great deal of the Errington property in England," says Lady Southwold, before whose mental vision many charming prospects are dancing ; and she rises and goes across to Cicely Seymour and kisses her on her sun-illumined hair.

"You will always give Wilfrid good counsel, won't you darling?" she says, very tenderly.

"Mr. Bertram will want no counsel but his own conscience," says Cicely Seymour, with the colour in her cheeks. "Oh,

¶ An Altruist

Lord Southwold, conscience is so rare in our days, it seems almost dead ; you should not laugh at those who through all mockery try to keep alive its sacred flame ! ”

“ Since Wilfrid has your esteem, my dear, I laugh at him no longer,” says Southwold, with pleasant malice. “ I am thoroughly convinced that he is the wisest, and will be the happiest, of men.”

QUIDA.

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